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TO

MARGARET.

My Beloved Wife,

I DEDICATE THIS STORY,

THE INSPIRATION OF WHICH SPRUNG FROM

THE DEEPEST SORROW OF OUR LIFE.

CHRISTMAS ANGEL.

BOOK THE FIRST.

THE VISION IN THE NIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

"POSIES OF LOVE, HEART-BORN AND BOUND."

IN the gray light of morning we lost a little child.

He was very young, having lived but a few days over sixteen months, but his short life was long in suffering. Delicate from his birth he had been to us an object of tenderest solicitude, and it was not till the inexorable truth was forced upon us that we realized the bitter grief that was about to darken our days. We had woven fond parental fancies for his future—posies of love, heart-born and bound—and some of our friends who were in the habit of seeing him lie, silent and resigned, upon his couch, with an expression of solemn thoughtfulness on his beautiful face, comforted us with the hope that he would in time grow strong, and, impressed by a strange earnestness in him most unusual in a child so young, prophesied that a noble and useful career was before him. Their hopes and ours were not to be fulfilled. Nature pressed with a hard hand upon him, and spared him no pang, until he drew his last breath, with a restful look in his sweet and patient eyes. He was grateful to die. While his life was ebbing away his mother and I each held one of his wasted hands, and he turned his eyes slowly

and lovingly from her face to mine, from mine to hers, as though entreating us not to sorrow for having brought him into the world. All that human care and love could do for him had been done, but the roads of life, with their storms and shadows and gleams of sunshine, were not for him. Upon the portal of death's open door angels were beckoning him, and he passed in contentedly.

Dead were the possibilities of that young life; withered were the posies we had woven for his future.

We had never heard from his lips the childish prattle so dear to parents' ears, and it was not granted to him to convey to our hearts, by the soft pattering of his little feet, home's sweetest music. Only on the night before his death did he utter an intelligible word. It was past midnight, and he lay upon his bed with heaving breast, from which swift gasps of agony escaped as he lay and fought for breath. In pain as deep as his we watched the sufferer, suffering with him, waiting and fearing, our hearts charged with grief and pity. For two days and nights he had had no sleep, and we said to each other, out of our helplessness, "If he could only speak to us! If he could only point out to us what to do to relieve his sufferings!" But there was no sign to guide us; so we sat and mourned, and waited through that dolorous time.

Our home was situated in the western part of the city, where, for nearly every hour of the twenty-four, the pulsations of its heart can be seen and felt, beating feverishly in wild desires for fame, and gold and pleasure; where the groans and music which accompany the march of progress are never for one instant stilled; where sword and gown, and rags and velvet, come into close contact; where smiles and tears are eternally mingled; where restless dreams, worthy and unworthy, are dreamed through day and night; some for fruition in a grave from which shall uprise sweet-smelling blossoms whose fragrance shall spread from pole to pole, to delight and invigorate un-

born generations—some fated to decay so base and vile that it had been a blessing if the dreamers had never drawn breath. The river was near, with its long line of mirrored lights reflected from street and sky, picturing spiritual cathedral aisles and mystic avenues stretching to interminable depths; and on its southern bank loomed the grand old abbey, in which great deeds and noble lives (and some which were neither) are recorded by sculptured marble reared over dust and crumbling bones. Within our room the clock ticked loud, with a warning and a lesson in every measured movement of the pendulum; "From life to death I keep the roll. From life to death, surely, surely!" The abbey bells chimed the divisions of the hours, and as each recorded particle of time glided into the past, and was forever lost to man and the world, the solemn sounds conveyed to us the message that death was in our chamber, and would soon take our dear from us. The bells were not the only sounds from without that troubled us. Discordant notes from wanderers of the night floated into the room—a laugh that was like a shriek, a line of song that was like a wail. The city was wrapped in treacherous slumber, and visions rose before me of human creatures slouching through the dark streets, slumbering against cold walls, lingering on the fateful bridges. Here, a man hungry, cold, despairing, who, in the time that was lost, held in his hands fair hopes which hot passion withered and destroyed; here, a child-woman, betrayed, misguided, wrecked, who, in the time that was lost, turned from the calm shelter of a mother's love, and deaf to warning, flew to the glaring lights that woo to shame and ruin; here, the unfortunate ones, who, in the time that never was, had no knowledge of the meaning of honesty and virtue—and through all these visions the muffled, unspoken refrain made itself heard, "From life to death, from life to death, slowly, surely!" Then, in the midst of a stillness, wherein the

ticking of the clock seemed for a few seconds hushed, our dear gave utterance to a cry.

"Mamma! Mamma! Mamma!"

It was the body's appeal to us, wrung from an overburdened heart.

We clasped each other, and, with eyes laden with tears, looked at the face of our child. The pain of life was there, and remained for several hours. He did not speak again, and in the morning his pain was lifted from him, and the blessing of eternal rest was his.

Two summers had passed over his head, but the flowers of earth bloomed not for him. We had been in the habit of making a resting-place for him on a couch placed in the recess of a window which looked out on a public garden, and there he would recline in an old-fashioned attitude, with his right foot drawn up and resting on his left knee. It was a bow-window, from which we had a view not only of the garden, but of the river and the abbey, and the walls of legislative houses where laws and wars are made. To the right, westward way, hidden from our sight, were the vile haunts of Westminster, in which corruption breeds and souls are lost. Hob-a-nob were noblest flower and foulest weed. It was well it was not in sight to sadden the glad view of the public garden. The birds, the trees, the devices of the bright flower-beds, the happy children playing about, rendered it one of the pleasantest scenes in the city. This from a distance, for coming into closer contact with certain features in the picture, drawn from those whose pathway of life lies chiefly in dark grooves, a view presented itself which clouded the scene. On days of sunshine we opened the window, and the soft warm air flowed into the room and kissed our boy's face, but brought no gladness to it. At rare intervals—often of many days—a smile, in which pity for himself seemed to be expressed, lingered about his pretty mouth. It made our hearts ache to witness it.

At rarer intervals we used to take him out into the public garden, where, reclining in his mother's arms, he could more plainly see the children playing about. His pathetic figure, with its touch of martyred sweetness, drew the children's attention upon him. Some came and put gentle hands upon him, or stood gazing at the quiet face in pity, occasionally murmuring, "Poor little fellow!" But the better dressed, who had nurse-maids to attend to them, were invariably called away, and were presently continuing their games round the flower beds. Thus, he was left much to himself. Lying in his mother's arms he was quite content to watch the fleecy islands of the clouds. One day, however, a child as thin and pale as our dear lad, but with more strength in her limbs, came to his side and gazed at him. He returned her gaze with an expression of solemn interest in his eyes, and she remained by him until it was time for him to be taken home. When next he lay in his mother's arms in the garden, the little girl came up and remained, as on the first occasion; and it seemed as though he recognized her, and derived a pleasure from seeing her again. Her clothes betokened that she belonged to the poorest classes, but her manners were not intrusive. My wife's sympathies are with the poor, and partly for that reason she did not repulse the little girl, as I might have done out of a feeling of disapproval at the association; but she was greatly influenced by an impression that the presence of the girl was a comfort to her darling. Had it not been for this, I have no doubt that I should have discouraged the intimacy. It is as well for me to say here that, although I have always been ready to recognize the hardships that perhaps too commonly fall to the lot of those who are born low down, I have at the same time held the opinion that the lines of demarkation prescribed by custom, usage, and the laws of society (these representing in my view important elements in what is understood by the term civilization) should be

most jealously observed. Vaguely, the idea of revolution presents itself, in which passions, now held in check, would be let loose to the danger of mankind. Seas and rivers are bound to their natural channels; destroy the barriers, and the world is lost. I have never sought to read between the lines of the laws under which I live. I have accepted them as they stand, reasoning that our present position is the result of generations of civilization, in the cause of which thousands of good men have labored, and that it would be nothing less than presumption in me to attempt to set wrong things right. That I have never felt the pinch of poverty is my good fortune. Each man to his lot. Our personal griefs are heavy enough to bear; why add to them by voluntarily taking upon our shoulders the trouble of others? Setting aside the palpable unfairness of such a course, the burden would be too great.

A selfish view, it may be said. I can advance nothing in extenuation, and my reserve on this head will be better understood as this story of human love and sorrow unfolds itself.

Another thing. Occasional observations and reflections even in these preliminary chapters may appear to clash with the opinions I have here briefly expressed. I can only explain the inconsistency by the statement that I am writing by the light of a new teaching as well as by that of old established views. I return now to my beloved child and his humble friend.

The intimacy, unchecked but silently resented by me, gathered strength as the days went by, and in the course of a short time some singular scenes grew out of this come-by-chance bond of sympathy. The girl brought other little girls and boys to see our lad, all of them poor, many of them in rags, to whom a good meal would have been a very substantial foretaste of heaven. It would be absurd to say that the sympathy they exhibited toward him was

in every instance sincere. There is a terrible genius whose name is Want, and with him these children were well acquainted. He had already taught them cunning, and, young as they were, there were among them many past masters in that quality. Indeed, with them it had become an art. They recognized the difference in station between our dear lad and themselves, and they witched coppers, and occasionally a small piece of silver from him, his mother being his willing almoner. She interpreted his charities, and saw hidden meanings in his eyes as the motley group of youngsters played their antics in his sight, walking on their hands, dancing the last eccentric dances with wonderful skill and spirit, and turning Catherine wheels for so long a time together and with such velocity that earth and sky must have resolved themselves into a huge teetotum in full spin. In these performances, apart from the profit they derived from them, there was, for the actors, as subtle a fascination as for our lad, who witnessed them with solemn approval. I did not suspect this in those days, but I learned it afterward, when our dear one was lying on the bed from which he was never to rise. They knew that he was slowly dying, and the sad truth elevated him into a person of distinction. Had they been performing before royalty they could not have exerted themselves more zealously.

The little girl who had brought these friends and companions from their haunts to entertain him was also a silent spectator of the performances, not joining in them, but regarding them with a critical eye, and doubtless encouraging them in private to renewed and novel efforts to amuse her young friend and patron. Not that she benefitted by them in a pecuniary sense. It never occurred to the other ragamuffins to offer to share their gains with her. Generally, when the guerdon was bestowed, they scampered off pell mell to a favorite cook shop, where a luxurious meal could be had for twopence. She remained be-

hind, and did not leave the gardens till it was time for our dear lad to be taken home.

How well do I remember the day upon which he visited the public gardens for the last time! With what vividness does it all come back to me! It was, indeed, a memorable day. The little girl was there. So close an intimacy had grown between her and our boy that his thin, wasted fingers were closed upon one of hers. She knew that his name was Charlie, and she was speaking softly to him. She was telling him of a dog she owned that had met with an accident, and promising to bring it to him when it was strong and convalescent.

"In all yer born days, Charlie," she said, "yer never see sich a dawg. There never was, and never will be, another to compare with 'im. He can do almost anythink but speak, and he's up to that number of tricks that he might 'ave come out in a pantermine if he 'adn't been so unfort'nit as do for 'isself. Many a time I've sed to 'im, 'Spot,' I've sed, and he's got that sense that he follered every blessed word I spoke, 'Spot,' I've sed, 'I'll take yer to Droory Lane, and we'll git yer an engagement at a pound a week, and per'aps I'll git taken on myself as a nimp at a bob a night; and then we'll 'ave cow 'eel and trotters for supper all through the season.' But wot does Spot do, d'yer think, Charlie, wot does he do the very morning as I washes 'im, and does myself up spruce, and was going to take 'im to the theayter? Why, as we was crossing the road he goes and gets 'isself run over by an omlibus, and 'as one of 'is legs took clean off! That spiles our little game for good and all. It was all up with Spot for the show business—and all up with me too, for *I* knew jolly well that, without Spot, they wouldn't as much as give me a second look—which," she wound up with unconscious humor, "they'd be bound not to do if they give me a fust."

Charlie never removed his eyes from her face. It was

a pathetic little face, thin and dark, with deep-sunken eyes which shone from out their hollows like bright black beads. Her hair hung in disorder over her forehead, her lips were beautifully curved, and, when parted, displayed a set of pearly, even teeth, all the whiter because of the dusky paleness of her cheeks. She had a woman's pair of boots on her feet, quite worn out, and old black stockings, also several sizes too large, on her legs, which in substance resembled the straight stems of a couple of long clay pipes. Although the most striking characteristic of this figure was its pathos, the face and eyes were not devoid of humorous touches, which, under happier auspices of worldly fortune, would have found more frequent play. As it was, she gave indications of this lighter humor, which would have met with greater success could she have kept it free from pathetic sentiment.

"Spot and me, Charlie," she continued, stroking Charlie's face with her disengaged hand, "are reg'lar pals. We've never been separated a day since I snatched him out of the pail they was trying to drown 'im in, and we've 'ad that number of larks together that there's no counting of 'em. He ain't got no one but me to look after 'im, and I ain't got no one but 'im to look after me. There's old Alablaster, though—I mustn't forget 'im; but he don't keep a bank. Now that Spot's short of a leg we ain't much good to each other. He knows he 'ad no business to go and git run over, and he tries to make up for it. 'Eart, Charlie! There never *was* a dawg with such a big 'eart as Spot. 'But wot's the good of that,' I ses to 'im, 'as fur as cow 'eel and trotters for supper goes'—(only think of it, Charlie! For a whole season!)—'Wot's the good of a big 'eart if yer ain't got the regerlation number of legs?' He waltzed that beautiful that we used to make a ring for 'im when the organ man come, as orfered me fippence for 'im, and because I wouldn't take it, stole 'im. But he didn't keep 'im long. Spot's teeth was too sharp.

He tries to waltz now, but all the time he's limping round he seems to be looking for 'is other leg, without knowing of it, and he's that clumsy and comic that he makes me laugh till I cry. 'It's not a bit of good, Spot,' I ses. 'Give it up.' And he gives it up, and goes and lays down in a corner, and begins to yelp. He couldn't yelp louder if he was going to 'is own funeral."

It pleased her, and it pleased my wife also, to believe that Charlie understood what she was saying, and took an interest in it. There was deep earnestness in her voice, which ordinarily was thin and shrill, but which was now so softened down by sympathy that it was truly melodious.

"Child," I said, won to her by the tremulous, sympathetic pulsation which sweetened every common word of the common story she was relating; there were occasions when her manifest tenderness and unselfishness were powerful weapons against the views I held of the poor; "Child, you speak as if you were alone in the world."

"Oh, no, sir," she said, cheerfully, "I ain't that. Why, there's Mr. Alablaster—"

"This is the second time you have mentioned his name," I said, interrupting her. "Who is this friend of yours?"

"He's the most wonderful man you could find all over the world. There ain't nothink he can't do. If anybody in Pentecost Court is taken ill, Mr. Alablaster knows wot's the matter the minute he sets eyes on 'im. He can tell fortunes, sir, and can read the stars. He's only got to look at yer 'and, and he finds out what's going to 'appen to yer and to everybody belonging to yer. There ain't nobody like 'im nowhere."

I set this man down in my mind as one of those harpies who rob and prey upon the poor—a vulgar fortune-teller, a little more cunning than his fellows, and therefore able to overreach them.

"Mr. Alablaster," continued the girl, "would do a lot

for me if he could, but yer can't do more than yer can, can yer, sir? He ain't rich, worse luck; fur from it. No, sir, I ain't alone in the world when Mr. Alablaster's by. And there's Bold Peggy—per'aps yer can call 'er to mind, sir; she's one o' them as comes to amuse Charlie; she's got a red face, and red 'air, and a turn-up nose, and she's the best dancer we've got in Pentecost. She can do the splits, sir. 'Er and me are pals—when she likes. Yer mustn't cross Bold Peggy, sir, when she's out of sorts; 'er temper's a caution. Then there's Blossie—yer don't know *'im* by name, I dessay, sir, but he's not to be mistook once yer've marked 'im. They *do* say, when he was a babby he was like a bit of waxwork, a reg'lar beauty. Golden 'air all round 'is 'ead, bloo eyes, and a skin like satting. That's 'ow he got the name of Blossie, sir—from Blossom. He's the boy that's always a-chooing a straw." (I recognized Blossie by this description; a strong, coarse-grained, beetle-browed youth, with a straw forever in his mouth, which he ostentatiously bit and chewed. His coat of arms, in fact. If he had ever possessed the beauty of form and features described by his eulogizer, no trace of it was left. He, as well as Bold Peggy, was one of my particular aversions.) "Blossie's mighty pertick'ler about that straw of 'is'n. He can lick any two boys in Pentecost, and once he licked a man twice as big as 'isself. He ses 'is father always choo'd a straw, and he's going to do it all 'is life; and wot's more, he won't let any other boy do it. If he ketches one with a straw in 'is mouth he licks 'im, and that settles it. He picks out his straws every morning, and cuts 'em all of a length, and goes on a-chooing of 'em all day long. Oh, no, sir, I ain't alone in the world, with Bold Peggy, and Blossie, and Mr. Alablaster. And if yer won't mind my saying so, sir"—and here she looked nervously at me; uncultivated and uneducated as she was, she had gauged and judged me—"there's Charlie. I think he likes me, sir, and I'm sure I like 'im. I'd do

'im a power of good if I was able to. I don't know which comes fust, sir, Charlie or Spot. I think it ought to be Spot, though he *is* only a dawg, 'cause I saved 'im from being drowned, and 'cause I've knowed 'im for so much longer. Alone in the world! Oh, no, sir."

"You have said nothing about your parents."

"Mother and father, sir?"

"Yes."

"Meaning, 'ave I got any, sir?"

"Yes."

"I can't say as I 'ave, sir; leastways I don't know nothink about 'em; they don't trouble their 'eads about me. Per'aps I'm as well off without 'em. Bold Peggy's got a mother and father, and they fight like cat and dawg; and Peggy, she comes in for *'er* share, I can tell yer."

"What is *your* name, child?" I asked.

"Molka," she replied.

CHAPTER II.

"FATE GUARD YOU, MOLKA."

WAS pondering over this singular name when I observed a sudden pleasant light in Molka's eyes. Seeking for the cause, I discovered it in a man who was walking toward us.

He was a man whose age, starting at forty, it was difficult to guess. In guile, of which there was evidence in his features, he might have been a centenarian; in lithe movement he might have been in his lusty prime; in expression, which was as remarkable for pity as for scorn, he might have lived his full span, after having gathered an abundant harvest of wisdom to enable him to judge of men and things with fatal, unerring certainty. Notwith-

standing these distinguishing marks, which impressed me at the first glance, a man quite commonly dressed, and seemingly poor.

"You know him?" I said to Molka.

"Yes, sir," she replied; "it's Mr. Alablaster."

I examined him more closely as he walked slowly toward me. Slim, tall, and erect, with reflective gray eyes, large-framed nose, straight, thin lips, large hands, with blue veins distinctly marked; with an empty purse I judged, and rightly judged, yet holding himself as a chief among men would have a warranty in doing. Conspicuous in subtlety, without a trace of meanness or cunning in his demeanor or gait: for a fox walks like a fox. Frank, without exhibition of weak affectations, such as foolish vanity often displays; deep without duplicity; strong without pride: There was nothing in him which was intended to proclaim, "I am I; behold me." His manhood asserted itself by the strength of inherent wisdom; he did not lower its quality, as some do, by affectation, of dress or manner, or by singularity of personal bearing, to provoke notice and comment. Such was the man whom Molka introduced to my notice as Mr. Alablaster, and I inwardly confessed that he could not but be a far different being than I had supposed him. I was compelled to render him so much justice, even before I came into communication with him. We form our ideals of men before we see them, and, as a rule are strangely disappointed in their presentment. Great statesmen, artists, authors, gods of our imagination, dwindle into mortal proportions when we behold them, and we regret that the magic veil of distance had not prevented us from becoming familiar to them. This statesman, whose achievments have glorified him into heroic proportions; this soldier, whose deeds proclaim him noble; this artist, who by a few touches of his brush, can make the canvas live; this author, whose pure vein of sentiment has drawn tears from our eyes,

seem of lower degree, because of our worship, when we are brought face to face with them. It is a shock to see that they come down to our level. They were sun-gods; they are ordinary clay. Best that those whose world's work proclaims them great should not be seen. Homer, were he walking among us, would prove a disappointment.

These experiences and disappointments have come to me, as to other men. Inversely, when Molka's friend presented himself, he was raised in my estimation instead of lowered.

"I thought you'd come," said Molka, in response to his greeting, "to see Charlie." And then to me, with earnest eyes, and still more earnest voice, "Mr. Alablaster can cure 'im, sir, if anybody can."

He turned to me, and said, with courteous smile, "In our alleys, especially about Pentecost, the female children call me Alablaster; the male children call me Alablastim. Put an aitch in the appropriate places, and were I an angry man I could find justification for my anger. My name is Alabaster."

"I've told Mr. Alablaster, sir," said Molka, "all about poor Charlie, and I begged 'im to come and make 'im well. I 'ope yer won't take it as a liberty, sir."

My wife's eyes overflowed, and, with unreasoning hope that leaped the barriers of inexorable destiny, she gazed with full heart at the man whom Molka had conjured to our side in our affliction. In *his* blue eyes a tender moisture shone. The mother's silent appeal, more potent than the rod of Moses, touched his heart, and drew forth his sympathy.

"Molka has faith," he said. "If it abide with her all her days she will be the happier for it."

There was in him a magnetism so powerful that I could not resist its influence. His speech confirmed the impression I had gained of him almost at the moment I had set

eyes on him. It was grave as well as courteous, and his words were so well chosen as to add to my wonder at the contrast between them and his manifest humble position in life.

"He is young," said Mr. Alabaster, laying his hand upon Charlie's head.

"Barely fourteen months," I said.

Charlie raised his eyes to Mr. Alabaster's face. Molka watched them with eager intentness. My wife also. I knew what was in her mind. She was thinking of healing by touch, and was hoping for a miracle. What passed in the minds of the man and the child was not revealed. For quite two minutes they gazed each upon the other with calm earnestness, and then Mr. Alabaster removed his hand.

"Spring time has come and gone," he said, "and the summer is lost to us." He pointed upward to a flock of birds busy in an old elm. "In a few days you will not see them; they will be traveling to a summer clime."

My wife's head drooped, and she drew our dear lad closer to her bosom.

"But yer don't say nothink about Charlie, Mr. Alablaster," said Molka, plucking his coat. "You *can* cure 'im, can't yer, and you *will*, won't yer?"

"I deal in herbs and simples," said Mr. Alabaster, addressing me, "roots with plain names, and nature's unadulterated remedies for the sicknesses of mortality. Having had some ordinary triumphs, I am credited with a power never possessed by man. As for your child—perhaps it is better so!"

"But can't yer tell 'is fortune, sir?" asked Molka.

"His fortune," replied Mr. Alabaster, "is told by a higher power."

Despite his kind accent, there was to my sensitive ears a callousness in his tone, and I could not avoid the exhibition of a feeling of resentment as I gazed at him. He did

not appear to notice it, but stood with his hand resting lightly on Molka's shoulder. It was only when he addressed me that the magnetism in him inthralled me. When his eyes were not upon my face his power was gone.

At that moment a number of Molka's ragged friends approached us, and would have commenced their antics had not a warning look from my wife directed me to forbid all noise. Charlie's eyes were closed and he seemed to be slumbering. I went to the children, and speaking sharply to them, bade them leave us in peace. But Mr. Alabaster, who was by my side, beckoned them to stay awhile, and they obeyed him and disregarded me. It was clear that he was a man who, by inherent force of character, held authority over them. Among the children were the two who had been described by Molka—Blossie chewing straw, and Bold Peggie. She was well named. Her face, her hair, her eyes were red. Her small, pointed nose, her bold, saucy looks, her defiant, reckless demeanor, her coarse laugh, her rags and general untidiness, had on previous occasions caused me to regard her with repugnance, and I was therefore surprised to see Mr. Alabaster draw her forward with an exhibition of singular tenderness and kindness. It did not raise him in my estimation. He put his hand under her chin, and a bold grin appeared on her face.

"Well, Peggy," he said.

"Well, Mr. Alablaster," she responded, "yer'll know me agin when yer see me. Wot d'yer think of me?"

"You are made and finished, Peggy," he said, gravely, "in the past, present, and future, without my intervention. Brain, bone, muscle, and flesh, you are what you are. Difficult to unmake you, my girl. Your destiny is writ." It was for my inspection that he held up her face, which was the embodiment of low vice and cunning. She saluted me with a familiar leer. "It needs no deep reader of human character to predict her future."

"Are yer going to tell my fortune, Mr. Alablaster?" cried Bold Peggy, clapping her hands. "That's wot yer mean by destiny, ain't it. I say, chaps, he's going to tell my fortune. Fair man or dark man, Mr. Alablaster?"

The other children gathered round, their mouths wide open, their eyes dilating.

"Your fortune, Peggy!" exclaimed Mr. Alabaster, in a kind tone. "You would really like to hear it? But that's a foolish question to ask."

"You're right there," said Peggy. "I say, make it a good 'un. I should like sich a lot o' things."

"You are not singular in that respect, Peggy. How old are you?"

"'Ow should I know? But I can tell yer somethink—I wasn't born yesterday."

"Where do you live?"

"You're gammoning me. 'Aven't yer been there lots o' times? Right at the bottom of Pentecost Court, in course."

"How many rooms have you, Peggy?"

"Well, that's a good un! I didn't think we was speaking of Buckin'am Palace. Why, one room, in course."

"How many of you live there?"

Bold Peggy did a sum on her fingers, and having come to the end of them on her two hands, said, "Blest if I can count 'em! There's the other lot as well as us. And oh, Mr. Alablaster, did yer 'ear that there was a bran new baby this morning?"

"Belonging to the other lot?"

"In course. Ketch mother 'aving any more!"

"A brand-new baby, eh? Born in the one room in which not less than a dozen of you live, eat, and sleep."

"Where else *should* it be born, I'd like to know?"

"Can you read, Peggy?"

"Not me."

"Or write?"

"Not a bit of it. But I tell yer wot I *can* do. I can draw."

"I was not aware that was one of your accomplishments. Give me a specimen."

He handed her a pencil and paper, and she drew, roughly, a sketch of the boy Blossie, with his straw in his mouth, so true to life as to elicit warm commendations from her companions, who tiptoed and craned over her shoulder to examine it, while Blossie, as the hero, struck an attitude. She gave the sketch to Mr. Alabaster, with the remark:

"'Ere yer are. A penny plain, and tuppence colored."

"So you have a talent," said Mr. Alabaster, "which, cultivated, and in a healthier garden, would produce good fruit."

"Blest if I can understand wot yer driving at. Can't yer come down a bit?"

"I'll try to, Peggy. Do you go to church?"

"Not likely."

"Do you pray?"

"Wot for, I should like to know?"

"Do you believe in God?"

"'Ere, I'm tired o' this," cried Peggy. "You want to take a rise out o' me, that's wot *you* want to do! Come along, chaps. He's only making game of us."

Away they scampered, laughing and jeering, mocking Mr. Alabaster's last question as they went. "Do *you* go to church, Blossie?" To which Blossie replied, "Church yer grandmother."

Mr. Alabaster turned to me, and asked:

"Whose is the happier fate—your child's or Bold Peggy's? Who is the most to be pitied?"

"Is death a blessing, then, and life a curse?" I asked, bitterly.

"Death is always a blessing," he said. "Whether life

is a curse frequently depends upon conditions over which those who are born under them have as much control as a feather in a fierce wind, though they are held responsible and accountable for the natural outcome of them. I have been called a fortune-teller, a reader of the stars. The art of divination, when applied to our fellow-creatures, is easily acquired, if the mind is not warped by prejudice, or clouded by the pride of race or prosperity. There are not so many varieties of human nature that one need be greatly puzzled to prophesy the fate of the young who are born and live in the Pentecost slums. You sow seeds, and though the darkness of earth hide them from your sight, you know the harvest which shall uprise from them. You are not disturbed by doubt of grain or flower. You graft, you experiment, for improvement and abundance of beauty; you plant, with full confidence in the result. So with human nature in the main. Gutter child, gutter man, unless you pluck it from its degradation before it has taken root, and transplant it to healthier soil. There are roses and roses. Our little queen, Molka—"

"Queen!" I echoed.

"Yes, queen. In healthy soil, though a taint be in her, she would be a fair rose in her years of blossom. As it is, unless an unforseen good occurs (which, thank God! *does* sometimes happen), what can she be but a sickly flower, a very mockery of a rose? If she fall, you will have no right to condemn her—any more than you will have the right to condemn Bold Peggy, the vices of whose blood have been nourished and strengthened at her mother's breast. All my pity is for such as she; before she sins, I am ready to forgive. Were the power mine, I would take all the Bold Peggies of the city, and, by means of my plants and simples, treat them to immediate oblivion, saying, as I so dealt by them, 'Die; be happy.'" He paused for a few moments before he spoke again. "The sight of your noble, patient child has moved me.

If he were to bless you by living he might teach you what you need—a lesson of toleration and mercy, for which grain he would have to thank his mother. But he may bless you by dying."

I turned from the speaker in horror and anger, but there was so strong a magnetism in him that I was presently listening to him again, against my will as it seemed. He made no allusion to my abrupt movement, which bore upon its front an air of rudeness, but calmly continued, as though no interruption had occurred.

"I was told by Molka that your lad had taken to her. It was solely for her sake that I came here to-day. She pleaded so wistfully that I had not the heart to refuse her. I tremble for her future, but I can do nothing for her, my means being barely sufficient for my own subsistence. If you have observed her features you will have seen that she is likely to grow into rare beauty. Her mother, I have heard, was very beautiful. I believe she is dead. For humanity's sake it is to be hoped she is, for, living, how could she hope to be forgiven for deserting her child and leaving her to the mercy of strangers? She was in some way celebrated or notorious, and was called Molka—otherwise, Queen. That name is her child's only inheritance. Our Molka lives from hand to mouth, the hand being frequently empty. She is capable of self-sacrifice, as you may have observed, and has a human vein of sympathy in her body. And now, as I perceive that both my theories and my presence are distasteful to you, I wish you good-day."

He lingered for a moment at Molka's side, and gazed down gravely upon her. She gave him a bright smile, and he walked slowly away. When he was gone I felt as if a weight were removed from my heart. Soon after he had taken his departure we also left the gardens, which our darling boy was never again to revisit.

Some time after this, within a week of our dear lad's

death, I met Molka in the Strand. She looked pale and thin, and I observed that she was lame.

"Have you met with an accident," I asked, "that you walk with such difficulty?"

Her face brightened instantly, in gratitude for my inquiry.

"Oh, it's nothink much, sir," she said. "Spot and me's a pair now. I was well-nigh run over, sir. I don't quite know 'ow it 'appened, but all at once as I was crossing the road, sir, there was I on my back, with some 'orses kicking over me. When they lifted me up they found out that my leg was broke. It 'd been all right if Mr. Alablaster 'ad been 'ere, but he was away in the country, and a doctor did somethink to my leg, and did it wrong, and they say they'll 'ave to break it agin on purpose afore they can put it right. I don't care, so long as I ain't going to 'ave it off. But never mind me, sir." And now her face grew anxious. "I want yer to tell me about poor Charlie. 'Ow is he, sir? I wasn't able to go to the gardens for a long while, so I missed seeing 'im."

"He has not been there," I said, sadly, "since you last saw him."

When she ceased speaking of herself and her troubles, which she did with much cheerfulness, I saw how wan she looked, and it seemed to me that she was in want of food.

"In remembrance of Charlie," I said, as I gave her a shilling.

She turned it over and over again in her hand; her lips trembled, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Thank yer, sir," she said, in a low tremulous tone; "it's more than kind of yer."

I nodded, and left her, but my attention was presently arrested by hurried, limping footsteps at my side. It was Molka, who had followed me, despite the pain she must have experienced in walking so fast.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said, huskily; "yer sed in remembrance of Charlie."

"Yes."

"And he ain't been in the gardens for ever so long!" She gave a swift apprehensive look at my hat. "No, no!" she cried. "Thank God Almighty! 'Cause if it *was*, yer'd 'ave crape on it!"

My heart almost ceased beating; she had put my fear into words.

"No, Molka," I said, "thank God our dear boy lives; but he is ill, child, very, very ill!"

"Very, very ill!" she echoed, in a voice as sad as my own. "Poor Charlie! Poor little Charlie!"

I turned from her again, and resumed my way; and as I did so I heard her sob. Looking back, I saw her leaning against the wall, with the tears running down her thin, white face. They were shed for Charlie, and when the terrible blow fell, and we were visited by the never-to-be-forgotten bereavement, I knew that Charlie's humble friend would be sorry to hear that he had been taken from us.

CHAPTER III.

"THERE WAS A HEAVENLY BEAUTY IN HIS FACE."

WHEN the first shock of grief at our loss was spent, and we realized that our dear lad's trouble was over, it comforted me to think that this sweet young soul had gone to its Creator with no stain upon it; that it was free from the soil of worldly ways; that it was white, and innocent, and pure. In the midst of her tears my wife found a spiritual consolation in the belief that her mother, who died many years ago, would take care of her child until death reunites her with her darling boy. My mother also would welcome and love him. His nature and hers

were alike remarkable for sweetest attributes of gentleness and patience.

I cleared a table at which I was accustomed to write, and the inanimate form of our dear lad was laid upon it, clad in his prettiest night-dress. It was winter, but I had obtained some simple flowers of love and remembrance, and these were scattered over him; some were in his right hand, and some in the white band round his waist. On his breast were a few winter flowers, gathered by his brother, whose years were but three, and whom we had sent to some friends in the country, so that he might be out of the way of death. There was a heavenly beauty in our Charlie's face. The loveliness of the picture, as it lay before me in the quiet room, will be, to my last hour, an abiding memory of infinite tenderness.

It was a fancy of mine that the table upon which he was placed should be drawn to the bow-window from which he used to watch the children at play in the public garden; it seemed to me a spiritual bond between the living and the dead.

Before I retired to rest I kissed the cold white lips and the hand that held the flowers. Then, treading softly, I went to my bedroom, with a prayer in my mind.

My wife was asleep, overpowered with fatigue. She would have lingered by the side of her dear lad all through the night, I believe, had I not prevailed upon her to seek repose. She needed it sorely, for she had been terribly overtaxed. But now her long night vigils were over, and nature was merciful. She was sleeping calmly and peacefully. A child herself in many of her ways, she had borne with surprising strength the duties which a mother's love, stronger even than a mother's duty, had imposed upon her. During the heavy days that were gone not a murmur for herself had escaped her. Traces of tears were on her eyelids, and her girl-baby was pressed close to her bosom. I kissed her without waking her, and thanked

God that I had for my mate a woman whose instincts were charitable and generous and whose mind was pure.

So that I should not disturb her I threw myself, dressed, upon a couch, and courted sleep. There was a strange and new significance in the darkness and stillness of my chamber, and I lay for hours, dozing lightly and waking suddenly; now oppressed by sorrowful reflection, now under the spell of a singular peace and calm. There was no terror for me in the knowledge that death was in the house, and when my dead child walked into my room and stood by my bedside, I felt neither surprise nor fear. He wore his white nightdress, and the flowers were in his hand and in the white band round his waist. He held, also, the flowers his brother had gathered for him in the country. His head scarcely reached my breast. He looked up at me, and I looked at him, in silence for a little while; and then he said, in a soft clear voice,

"Come with me."

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BOOK THE SECOND.

THE ROADS OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

"I DREW GLADNESS FROM THE GLADNESS OF HIS HEART."

THE night was very dark. Not a star was to be seen. A black veil of clouds was over the sky, in which there was no life or movement. The moment my child and I were in the open I was conscious of a change in the time of year. We had either traveled back a season or forward three. The winter was no longer with us, and a soft warm breeze glided through the gloom.

The only light to guide me on my way emanated from the white dress of my child and from the beautiful face he turned toward me. I saw the face clearly in the midst of the darkness, and the brown eyes with their lovely lashes, which had been the pride of his mother's heart and mine, and the light brown hair, upon which a glory seemed to rest. I knew that he was at peace; his face proclaimed it. With a glad heart, because of the gladness which dwelt in the heart of my child, I kept pace with the little feet which pattered by my side.

We met no living soul. Had any been near I should have known of their presence, but my child and I might have been alone in the world for any sounds which reached my ears. Even the sound of my own footsteps was hushed, and I rather felt than heard the pattering of the little feet I had so often kissed. Occasionally I stooped and caressed the head of my child, and kissed him, and fondled his baby hand, and always when I did so it brought to my lips a reflection of the calm and happy smile which rested on his own. Thus we walked on, in perfect peace and contentment. The fever and unrest which had filled my soul for many months past took flight, and a spirit of heavenly repose pervaded my being. I did not pause to consider whither we were walking, or to what end, and I was not troubled by thought of what was behind or before me. I felt myself under the influence of a higher power than that contained in mere human will, and I yielded unresistingly. I could not see the roads we were traversing, but no sense of danger caused my steps to falter. At first we traversed the roads of a city; the firm pavement beneath my feet assured me of this fact, no less than the scarcely perceptible outlines of tall buildings which impressed themselves more upon my inner than my outward senses. Gradually the number of these buildings was lessened until we left them entirely behind us. We trod now through a lane, with fragrant

hedges, more than man high, on either side, now upon a wide expanse of grass, now upon a crisp springy soil from which sweet odors rose, and now upon a narrow track cut through fields of wheat almost ready for the scythe. The soft musical sybillation of the waving stalks conveyed a meaning to my mind. In this tender whispering of the corn I heard nature's beneficent message to man. Oppression and greed were dead, killed by a holier light than that which illumines the brain of the ghoul who speculates in food. Within fair and honest limitations every workman could enjoy the earth and the fruits thereof. The lessons of humanity had blossomed into flower, and made themselves felt in the midst of the darkness. I was truly happy.

It is not possible for me to say for how long a time we walked before I became conscious of a strange change in the scenes by which we were surrounded—a change which affected the common conditions of human life and the ordinary rules of nature; nor can I say how the knowledge came upon me. It is sufficient that I knew that the seasons were traveling their course, and that the autumn was again approaching. I was gifted with a spiritual sight which enabled me to perceive that the corn was cut, that the hops were gathered, and that the brown leaves were falling at our feet. Soon I felt the approach of winter, and the bright berries of the holly shone among the polished leaves; the soft snow fell, and beautified the woods and hedges with quaint device, and I almost fancied I could hear the angels singing their holy songs of peace and good will. So the winter passed away with its glistening eyes and health-giving breath, and in the warm earth which lay beneath the snow the primroses were waiting for spring. It came in all its beauty, and tree and leaf rejoiced in their new birth. Their warm winds kissed my cheek, and it was summer again. Thus we traveled on unwearyingly from season to season, from year to year.

Often for a brief space rain fell, and snow, but they touched us not; we journeyed through the storms in safety, and there was not so much as a stain upon us. And still the same calm and happy smile rested upon the mouth of my child, and I drew gladness from the gladness of his heart. But suddenly a deeper calmness encompassed us, and I heard the striking of the clock of a distant church. We stopped to listen, and I counted the strokes. The clock struck the hour of ten. By that sign, and by no other, did I then know that I was in the world, and of it.

From that moment it was beyond my power to separate the real from the unreal. Each was merged into the other by methods so subtle that it was impossible to disentangle them. All that had passed presented itself to my mind in a confused shape. It appeared to me as if I had been for years dominated by dreams which had brought to my soul the extremes of joy and woe, and that even now I was but partially awake. Two horsemen flew past us with the velocity of the wind, and when they were gone I could not decide whether they were shadows or veritable flesh and blood. Yet swiftly as they flew I had caught a glimpse—or had my imagination conjured it up?—of one who had long been dead to me, a brother who in his youth had so roused our father to anger that he was turned from home, to wander through the world, cut off from those nearest to him in blood. Who was wrong, the father or the son? One was in his grave. Did the other still live? In the distance I saw the light of a forge. The upper part of the door was open, and the sparks were rushing merrily about; I could distinguish the figures of the blacksmiths, now glowing with flaming color, now paling into black outlines, and the clang of their hammers was rythmically distinct. This was no vision; it was of the world, and I had no doubt of its reality when the course of our journey hid the forge and

the flying sparks from my sight. I gazed at my child to ascertain whether the picture had made any impression upon him. There was no change in his face. It was placid and beautiful.

CHAPTER II.

"ONLY THROUGH THE ROOF OF FLOWERS WERE THE STARS VISIBLE."

A SOFT wind was now blowing upon us, and it brought upon its wings the sound of organ music. It was very sweet, and at no great distance. The volume of sound did not increase as we approached nearer; and presently it was associated with the harmonious singing of children. But gradually the sound, which, for the first few minutes, was most melodious and soothing, lifting the soul into a region of heavenly contemplation, was disturbed by gentle wails, as though the singers were in pain. We walked on slowly until there came into view a shadowy porch, the entrance to a church of slender silver-barked trees, with a roof of vines in flower. So beautiful was the picture, and so appropriate for a sacred temple were the trees and flowers of which it was built, that I stood before it awhile in wonder and delight. My child, pulling me by the hand, aroused me, and we walked through the porch into the church.

It was filled with children, who lay with faces upturned to the flowery roof, through the interlaced branches of which a canopy of bright stars could be seen. I was rejoiced at the heavenly light, for it was the first which had shone upon us in all our long journey. I stepped outside, and looked at the sky. The night was still dark, and I could not penetrate the veil of black clouds which hung above me. The church was the center of an aureola, and only from within, through the roof of flowers,

were the stars visible. Re-entering the building, I discovered that the singing proceeded from the lips of the children, who lay otherwise so still, with white upturned faces. More clearly now could I distinguish the soft sighs which issued from their bosoms. The music and the singing continued. I could not see the organ or the player, nor could I fix the spot from which the music proceeded. It filled every part of the church, from wall to wall, from roof to ground, which I perceived was carpeted with velvet moss. The children showed no recognition of my presence, and I knelt to observe them more closely. I did not need to be told that they had belonged in life to the ranks of the very poorest in our cities. Bending over them, I said:

"Tell me, little ones, why, in this place and upon you alone, the stars are shining which nowhere else are visible?"

I paused for a reply, and paused in vain.

"Will you not speak to me?" I continued. "Tell me, at least, children, what hymn or dirge you are singing" —(for I could not distinguish the words)—"and why you lie so still?"

They returned no answer, nor did they exhibit any consciousness of being spoken to. But their silence seemed to me to be pregnant with a mysterious significance closely touching myself, and in deep distress I looked upward and cried:

"Will no one answer me?"

And through the roof of flowers a star slowly descended, and, passing over the faces of the children, finally hovered above the form of a girl ten or eleven years of age. Then from above I heard a voice:

"Not to you can the lips of these little ones be unsealed."

"Why not to me?" I asked.

"Search your own heart for the answer. What charity,

unless inspired by selfish sorrow, would you show to them living? If you desire enlightenment, seek it through your child."

I looked entreatingly at my child, oppressed by a fear that he might also condemn me. He answered my look with a tender smile, and, with a divine pity in his face, moved to the side of the girl above whom the star was shining and laid his hand upon her lips.

"Who were you?" he asked.

"My name was Bess," answered the motionless figure.

"Where were you born?"

"By the side of the river, which used to creep into our cellar and bring disease and fever with it."

"Why did you not leave it and find a healthier and sweeter place to live in?"

"It was not possible. Our home was there. We had no other."

"Had you brothers and sisters?"

"Seven."

"Did they all sleep with you in the cellar to which the river was so cruel?"

"All of them."

"And your mother and father as well?"

"Sometimes; not always."

"Where is your father now?"

"In prison."

"When he was a child, was he like you?"

"He was like me."

"Did he teach you anything?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"To swear and thieve."

"You did so?"

"I did so."

"When he was a child, was the teaching he received from his parents the same as he imparted to you?"

"It was the same."

"Was it the same with your mother?"

"It was the same."

"Where is she at the present moment?"

"In a gin palace."

"Was she often there when you lived?"

"Every day and every night."

"Did she take you with her?"

"Sometimes."

"Would you have visited it as frequently had you lived?"

"Yes. It was so light and gay. Our cellar was dark and miserable. The rats came in with the river."

"You had a sister, the eldest of the seven, a young and pretty woman. Can you see her now?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"In the streets of the city, lingering about."

"What kind of teaching was hers?"

"The same as mine; the same as my mother's."

"What kind of life is she living?"

"Do not ask me. Every one knows."

"Every one. The high and the low?"

"Yes, every one. There is no secret in it."

"Would you have been like her, had you lived?"

"I should have been like her."

"It is good you died. You are glad, are you not?"

"I am glad. The pain is over. I am saved from shame."

"Your companions, those who are lying around you now—are they of the same class as yourself?"

"Yes."

"There are many of you?"

"There are thousands of us."

At this answer the star's light was extinguished.

The quiet voices of the child who questioned and the

child who answered penetrated my heart, and even the music and the singing—which continued without interruption—sweet as they were, brought no relief to me.

I clasped my face with my hands; I was conscious that every question put by my child had been silently dictated by me, and that he was speaking out of my mouth. For him to hear what I heard, for him to understand what I understood, was a reproach upon me, who had sought the meaning of the mystery which lay before me. I removed his hand from the lips which had answered him, and placed my own upon them as a seal; and the moment I did so the singing and the music ceased, and the church, with its silver-treed walls and its roof of flowers, melted from my sight.

CHAPTER III.

"OUT OF DARKNESS INTO LIGHT."

We were again in the open, and I walked by the side of my child, guided, as before, by the light which hovered about his form. But a sadness had fallen upon my heart which the surrounding gloom intensified. My only consolation sprung from the presence of my child, and from the knowledge that he had led an innocent life, and that I had done him no wrong. For in the faces of the dead children in the flower-crowned church, I had seen signs which told unmistakably of evil done to helpless babes not only by human neglect and human cruelty, but by human blindness and ignorance deep sown in those to whom they looked naturally for guidance and teaching. Born in the gutters. Let them live there, objects of suspicion from their birth, and let them be carefully hedged in, so that they shall not soil the clothes of their more fortunate brothers and sisters. We legislate for them—at a snail's pace. In the meantime they are human, to

be judged by human laws, to be condemned eternally (ninety-nine out of every hundred of them) by voices from the pulpits preaching a Christianity beautiful in theory and almost dead in practice. And all around them is light, which attracts to burn and destroy, as it has done for generations, those who have gone before them. If they strive to snatch the flowers that grow outside their boundary, if they look with envious eyes upon luxury and ease, if they grumble in their rags as they shiver with cold, if they doubt that Heaven has ordained that they shall want food with plenty all around them—what then? If they cry, "We are, after all, human as you are, with human passions and desires, with human longings for sweets and pleasures, with human aspirations to enjoy the fruit which nature sends for all"—(not that they are likely, from their teaching, to express themselves in language so clear and concise; oaths would sometimes, vulgarity would always, predominate)—if in any way that is open to them they strive to make themselves and their longings understood, who shall blame them, and not proclaim himself blind or inhuman? It is not alone human bodies that the issues affect; immortal souls are as deeply, if not more deeply, concerned.

Such thoughts as these came to my mind, out of my altered mood, and it did not surprise me to see them expressed, to some extent, in palpable shape. A luminous light, resembling the sheen thrown by the moon upon the surface and into the depths of peaceful waters, stretched itself before me on the level land. It commenced at a distance of about twenty feet from where I stood, and the intervening space and the space beyond it were wrapped in deep gloom. The space on either side was also as black as the blackest night. And from out of the darkness issued a horde of children of both sexes. They were all poorly clad, many in rags, and their feet were for the most part bare. Traces of suffering were visible in every one of

their emaciated bodies. Some crept, some crawled, and some, whose minds were preternaturally sharpened, walked defiantly, wearing upon their countenances a cunning leer it was most painful to see. Some cried for food and water, and ever and anon, in the air above them, ripe fruit appeared, hanging from bush and tree. A few of the children, maddened by the temptation, leaped toward the fruit and strove to seize it; and, balked in the attempt, fell to the ground, maimed and bleeding. They were compelled to rise quickly and struggle on as best they could, for the crush behind them was so great that, had they not looked to themselves, they would have been trodden down and sorely hurt. Their misfortunes, however, did not deter others from leaping upward to the ripe and tempting fruit, but they fell back in disappointment, as those before them had done. And so the march and the struggle went on, out of darkness into light, out of light into darkness. In course of time the ranks of these poor children began to thin. The strong had gone first, pushing their way to the front; the lame, the blind, the crooked, were left in the rear. Among them was a little lame girl, who limped along with the aid of an old crutch, which had evidently been cut down to fit her diminutive form. She had but two garments on her, a petticoat and a frock, and these were in tatters. Around the foot which touched the earth as she limped a piece of old calico was wrapped; it was blood-stained, and every now and then a fresh red spot appeared. It was easy to perceive that she was in great physical pain, but she bore her sufferings with surprising cheerfulness. So slowly did she move that in a little while she was the only one left of all the crowd of children who had, as it were, been born in darkness, and had passed away in darkness. It was only when she was quite alone—a pathetic, patient, suffering little figure standing desolate in the line of light—that I perceived she had a companion, upon which she

looked down continually with a smile which she tried her hardest to make merry. This companion was a mongrel dog, in a worse plight than herself in respect of his limbs, for he had but three legs of flesh and bone, the fourth being a wooden one, which he managed in a manner so whimsical that, sad as my mood had been, I could not help smiling at the oddity.

"Come along, Spot!" exclaimed the mite of a child, and her voice pierced the air with wonderful distinctness. "Come along, doggie! It ain't a bit of good dawdling; yer'll never git on in the world unless yer stir yer stumps."

There was not a touch of petulance or anger in her tones; the reproaches she conveyed to the sense of her humble companion had in them a ring of exceeding tenderness.

But where had I heard the voice? It was strangely familiar, and yet at the moment I could not recall a distinct memory of the hapless little being to which it belonged. The name of the dog, too, surely it was not the first time it had been mentioned in my hearing! Had the waters of forgetfulness passed over me that I could not bring the child and her dog clearly to my mind?

The movements of Spot, as he used his best endeavors to "stir his stumps" (though Heaven knows they were quick enough for the strength of his little mistress), were so extraordinarily eccentric that I broke out suddenly into a fit of hysterical laughter, and notwithstanding that I felt it was nothing less than inhuman to laugh at a scene so fraught with melancholy features, I could not restrain my mirth. The sounds which issued from my cruel throat awoke a myriad mocking echoes in the darkness, and from every point of surrounding space came derisive laughter at the lame girl and her dog. Awestruck at the sounds I had invoked, I held my muscles in control by a powerful effort of will, and when I was silent the mocking echoes died away. With remorse in my

heart I gazed at my child, humble and abashed, expecting to meet my punishment in his eyes, but though I plucked him by the hand and called to him, he paid no heed to me. He was bending eagerly forward, looking at the two hapless creatures with an expression of infinite pity on his face.

"Did yer 'ear that, Spot?" said the girl, who, while the laughter continued, had stood quite still, trembling with fear. "Did yer 'ear that? I wonder wot they meant by it? I thought we was alone. If it's thieves, they can't git much out of *us*, can they? We couldn't raise a copper between the pair on us—wus luck! No supper to-night, Spot, for neither on us, and precious little to eat all day. Never mind. Better luck to-morrer."

Spot wagged his tail, and turned his liquid eyes on his little mistress. She had not far to stoop, being so short, to pat and fondle the dog for his sympathetic glance.

"If it wasn't for you, Spot, I should feel awful lonely 'ere, 'cause it's a 'underd to one that we'll 'ave to sleep out to-night. It ain't the fust time, and it won't be the last. But I say, Spot! Suppose it ain't thieves. It might be fairies, who wouldn't mind doing us a good turn. I say, please!" she cried aloud, "we'd be ever so grateful to yer, me and Spot would, if yer'd 'elp us on a bit! Yer might do wus; upon my word yer might!"

It was idle talk on her part, I knew, and only indulged in to give Spot a rest, and to help to lighten their weary way. I felt that she was imbued with a courage to endure and make the best of things which was almost superhuman in one so weak and attenuated. So she and Spot, after she had satisfied herself that there were no fairies to assist her, moved onward, every step they took being attended with increasing pain. Suddenly, as she limped, a sharp stone pierced her foot, and the rag in which it was wrapped became instantly stained with fresh

blood. With a scream of agony she fell to the ground, and clasped her foot, her body swaying to and fro, and moans of pain escaping from her lips.

At the sound of these cries of human suffering my child ran swiftly from me, and fell down by the side of the girl.

"Charlie, Charlie!" I cried, "where are you going? What are you about to do?"

He did not answer me, and I saw him throw his arms round the neck of the suffering girl and press his face to hers, while Spot stood close, licking the blood, in pity, which oozed from the wounded foot. Thus they remained for many minutes, and I, who had followed Charlie the moment he left me, and now stood by the side of the children, had no power to separate them. The will to do so was mine, but I seemed not free to exercise it, and I stood rooted to the spot upon which I stood. Soft sobs escaped from Charlie's breast, and it shocked me to observe that his face and dress were soiled either from the long journey we had taken, or from contact with the child whose suffering cries had drawn him to her. The flowers which had been gathered for him by his brothers were gone, and some had dropped from his waistband on the road; the few that were left were withered. A change, too, had come upon his face; it was pinched with want, and had grown much older, and a pang shot through my heart as I detected in it certain signs of resemblance to the faces of the phantom children who had hungered for the fruit which had hung above them, and which they had vainly striven to seize. How, and in what way, had this come about? Could it be possible that there was any kind of kinship, in circumstance if not in blood, between my child and those unfortunates? It was a monstrous, incredible fancy, but I could not shake it off. It remained with me to torture me and to fill me with an agony of unrest. But Charlie and the girl were speaking now; and what passed between them claimed my attention. So in-

thralled had she been by the pain from her wound that she could not look into the face of the dear lad who had flown to her in sympathy. Her pain being lessened, she wiped the tears from her eyes, which until now had been blinded by them, and turned to her consoler and recognized him.

"Why, Charlie," she cried, in a tone of surprised delight, "is it you?—is it really, really you?"

"Yes, Molka," he replied. "I am so sorry for you! Are you still in pain?"

"No, Charlie, no!" she exclaimed; "it's nothink, nothink! *You're* not to worry over it. I do believe I was shamming."

"No, Molka," he said, "your pain was real, your cries were real, or I should not have come to you. I heard you, from afar off, such a long, long way from here! Let me bind up your foot." He lifted it on his lap, and cried, "Oh, Molka, Molka!"

"Yer mustn't make a fuss over *me*, Charlie! But 'ow good of yer to come—'ow good of yer to come! Wotever 'ave I done to deserve it?"

"You are my one friend," he said. "I can never forget you, Molka—never! I can thank you now, perhaps," he added, softly, "I can help you now."

"Wot are yer doing of?" she said, holding his hand, in which was a fragment of his white dress, which he had torn away to bind round her foot. "Yer mustn't tear yer pritty dress for me! No, no, Charlie, yer mustn't!"

He gently removed her hand.

"Let me be, Molka. I will do what is right. There! Does that make it a little easier?"

"It is well, Charlie. Quite, quite well! Your 'and is so cool and sweet, it 'as 'ealed me already. Don't mind my crying a bit; I cant 'elp it, and it'll do me good. But to think of it," she said, when she had mastered her tears. "That you and me should be 'ere together! Well,

of all the things as ever 'appened! And Spot! we mustn't forgit Spot. 'Ere he is, Charlie; so tired, so tired!—tireder nor me a good bit. But Spot's the kind of dawg as never ses die; rather than run away from me and look arter 'isself, he'd limp by my side till he dropped down dead. Wouldn't yer, Spot? He thinks I ain't able to take care of myself since I got run over the same as he was. I told yer a lot about Spot in the gardens, Charlie?"

"Yes, Molka."

"That was the last day I sor yer—and oh, I *did* miss yer so! I thought of yer all the time, Charlie. I couldn't come to you 'cause of my accident, and you couldn't come to me 'cause you was so ill; You're better now, aren't yer?"

"Yes," he replied, "I am better now."

There was in his voice a grave and tender sweetness such as I had never heard from other lips. It was as though his heart was speaking, and not his tongue. In all its inflections and modulations, in every word he uttered, this tender sweetness was its dominant quality.

"That day," said Molka, "when Mr. Alablaster was in the gardens—you remember it, Charlie?"

"I remember it," he responded.

"I was telling yer of Spot, and that I would bring 'im to see yer when he got well. I thought arterward what a selfish little cat I was not to promise to give 'im to yer, but I couldn't bring it over my 'eart to part with 'im. 'Im and me, we only 'ad each other, but I ought to 'ave done it, Charlie, to try and make yer well."

"I am well without it, Molka. And Spot and I are going to be great friends. He likes me already, you see."

"Spot likes everybody as gives me a kind word. Yer'd 'ardly believe the sense he's got. He didn't 'ave a wooden leg then, Charlie, but a friend of Mr. Alablaster's, a young doctor as does operations and was going out to

Australia, come to wish Mr. Alablaster good-bye, and Mr. Alablaster sends for me and Spot. When the doctor sor Spot he fell a-laughing to that degree I thought he'd never stop. I didn't mind 'im laughing, for I sor he didn't mean any 'arm by it. Sich a handsome young gentleman, Charlie, and that good and clever that I ain't got a word to put to it! While he's laughing, Spot gits a-licking of 'is 'and, and a-looking up in 'is face, as much as to say, '*You* know all about legs; can't yer do somethink for me?' Would yer believe it, Charlie? The doctor—he wasn't more nor eighteen, and he 'ad the loveliest eyes and 'air that ever was seen—he understands Spot, he does, and he ses, 'It's my opinion,' he ses, 'that the dawg's arksing me to make 'im a wooden leg; and by Jove'—yes, Charlie, he ses, 'and by Jove, I'll make 'im one!' And he does, Charlie. He lays Spot on the table, and measures 'im, and studies 'im, and a couple o' days arter he comes with a strap and a leg, and fixes it on Spot, and is as proud of the job as if he'd done it for the Queen of England 'erself. If he'd arksed me to pay 'im for it I couldn't ha' done it, but I think Mr. Alablaster made it up to 'im some'ow. Yer never see nothink so comic, Charlie, in all yer born days, as Spot when he first begun to walk with 'is wooden leg. He'd take three soft steps and a pat, and stop like a bit o' stone to find out where the noise come from. Then he'd begin agin, and stop agin, and put out 'is wooden leg and bark at it, and run round and round arter it till he got giddy, and fell down all of a 'eap. But he's got used to it now, and is as proud of it as if it was made of gold and dymens."

"Do you live in the same place, Molka?"

"Yes, in Pentecost; and Bold Peggy, too, and Blossie; they're all there. It's time for me to be gitting on; I'm ever so much better. Jest afore you come, Charlie, I was frightened; I 'eerd a lot of people laughing at me and mocking me. I don't know now what it could ha' been,

but it sounded very cruel; for wot is there to laugh at in me, eh, Charlie?"

"Ah, what indeed?" sighed Charlie, as he assisted Molka to rise. "Are you obliged to walk with a crutch?"

"Can't git along without one. Can't git along very well *with* one," she added, with a touch of her old humor; "but now *you've* come, luck'll turn per'aps. At first I thought them voices was thieves; then I thought they was fairies, and I called out to 'em. I don't want no fairies now, Charlie; I've got a angel for a friend."

At this moment I heard a cry of distress and pain, some twenty or thirty yards from where I stood, and without thought I turned in its direction. It proceeded from a woman, who, with a heavy child in her arms, was leaning against a hedge. She was young and fair, and in a sad state from long and weary travel, and, as her words implied, from poverty.

"For the love of God, sir, assist me!"

"In what way can I assist you?" I asked, bitterly. "Do you not see that I am as poor as yourself?"

These words were wrung from me by the sudden knowledge that came upon me that my clothes were ragged, worn by long travel, as the woman's were, and that my pockets were empty.

"You are a man," she said, in a pleading tone; "if you can't give me money or food, you can lend me a helping hand on my way. I am ready to die with fatigue. Carry the child for me for a few minutes."

"I have a suffering child of my own," I said, with no feeling of sympathy or charity for her, "who needs all my care. Let every one look after his own; it is a sufficient burden. I have already left my child too long."

"Do not leave me alone, sir," she pleaded; "I am utterly worn out."

I paid no further heed to her, and returned to the spot on which I had left Charlie and Molka. To my conster-

nation I could not find them. I called for Charlie, and searched for him in every direction; I called also for Molka. I tore frantically from place to place; but all my efforts were vain. The mocking echoes alone responded to my cries, as they responded to the laughter drawn from me by Molka's sufferings.

"Woman," I exclaimed, for she had followed me, and had gazed on me in silence during my ineffectual search, "this is your work! But for you I should not have left my child; but for you I should not have lost him."

"What had I to do with it?" she demanded, gloomily and wearily. "I cried because I was in pain. Is that a crime? I never set eyes on you before, and I don't care if I never set eyes on you again. As for your child, what is he to me? Let every one look after his own; it is a sufficient burden. Mine is more than sufficient."

Though the words were my own, their callousness chilled my heart. I continued my search. "Charlie, Charlie!" I called; "come back to me! Where have you gone? What have I done that you should desert me?"

It added to my distress that I knew not in what part of the country I was. The forests of trees, the wide expanse of fields, the fragrant lanes and hedges, and all the other signs of rural life by which I had been surrounded, had disappeared.

"Charlie, is it?" said the woman.

"It is my child's name," I said, in grief and bewilderment.

"You mentioned another. Was it Molka?"

"Yes, a beggar child, who has wickedly lured my boy away."

"Nonsense; time enough for that; you must wait till they're grown up. Where have you come from?"

"From the city. We must be many a score of miles from it."

"You are out of your senses. There is the city; you can see the lights."

I gazed in the direction of her outstretched finger. The lights of the city were gleaming in the distance.

"Do you know the city?" I asked.

"Too well, too well!" she moaned. "I have been in the country, trying to get work. I could not find it, and I am driven back."

Driven back! To what part of the city? To the poorer quarters, of course. What other for such as she? Charlie and Molka were there. It was there I must seek my child.

"Can you tell me where Pentecost is?" I asked.

"I am going to the place," she replied. "If you will carry my baby a bit, I will take you there."

I took the baby from her, and walked by her side toward the shining lights, in the center of which lay the courts and alleys of Pentecost.

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BOOK THE THIRD.

WOODLAND SHADOWS.

CHAPTER I.

"TRUE TO HER, TO THE LAST HOUR OF HIS LIFE."

AN afternoon service in the Abbey. A famous divine from the country had obtained permission to occupy the pulpit, and, minister of Him who came to preach peace and good-will to man, was delivering a sermon on Glory to a fashionable and distinguished audience. He was an eloquent man, and spoke fluently and well, and perhaps in all the vast congregation there was but one who did not approve of his utterances; but even this man, single

though he might have been in the side he took, followed the preacher with genuine interest, and while he quarreled with the matter, approved of the manner and the polished style.

This silent dissentient was Mr. Alabaster.

The occasion of the afternoon service was a popular one. In a far-off land a great victory had been gained by our troops, in which blood had been shed like water and thousands of lives sacrificed. That those against whom we warred were fighting a battle which, were their cause ours, we should have deemed saintly and heroic, was not the point of view from which the audience of the Rev. Mr. Birley (who, if he lived, would in all human probability one day be a bishop) regarded the subject. We had fought, we had conquered—glory be to God! Which, to Mr. Alabaster and to some other few who declined to take the popular side as a matter of course, judging such matters from the widest standpoint—say, for instance, from the standpoint of universal humanity—might have been considered paradoxical, inasmuch as we were glorifying ourselves, and as our foes, having a very sincere religion of their own to which they clung with all their might and main, were calling on God at the same time to smite us hip and thigh, and pour desolation on our heads. But the reverend gentleman's audience were satisfied and gratified; his resonant, noble voice stirred their hearts; the music of psalm and anthem rolled solemnly through the grand old aisles; sculptured monuments recording our greatness, no less than the ashes of the mighty dead, sanctified the service; and when it was ended they filed slowly out of the Abbey, blinded by a glamour which they falsely believed was derived from Divine light.

Half an hour afterward the Rev. Mr. Birley himself left the Abbey, and stood for a moment or two gazing toward the bridge which, when starlight and moonlight are shining on it, is one of the most picturesque sights in

Europe. Of all the numerous audience who had hung upon his words only one remained. This was Mr. Alabaster, who had lingered with fixed intent, and who, when the reverend gentleman paused, went quietly forward and stood by his side.

The Rev. Mr. Birley did not observe him, but when, his brief contemplation over, he moved slowly away and Mr. Alabaster moved in the direction he was taking, his attention was arrested, and he gazed at the person who had thus intruded himself.

His observation at first was slight and carelessly bestowed, but no sooner had he turned his eyes away than, animated by a perplexing fancy in nowise disagreeable, he directed them again upon Mr. Alabaster, who now returned his gaze, and smiled.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the Rev. Mr. Birley.

"Quite possible," replied Mr. Alabaster, still smiling; "indeed, a veritable matter of fact; and I hope," he added, his smile vanishing, "not unwelcome because of these."

The words were accompanied by a motion of his hand toward his clothes, which were very common.

"You can not so misjudge me," said the Rev. Mr. Birley; "it was never in your nature—"

"And is not," quickly interrupted Mr. Alabaster. "I am unchanged."

"I am cordially glad to see you," said Mr. Birley, offering his hand, which Mr. Alabaster warmly shook; "but indeed, it is like opening a page in the dead past."

"Is that your idea?" asked Mr. Alabaster. "For me there is no dead past; it lives, as the present does, and the future."

"Yes," said Mr. Birley, "still the same—still the same. No other man, in my experience, ever talked as you talk. The same old turns of speech, with meanings in your words which must be hidden from all who know you not as I know you. How long since we met, Richard?"

"Twenty years."

"So long! Yes, it must be that; a life-time, Richard. You pointed to your clothes. Explain them."

"The humbleness of them? Do they not explain themselves? I am poor."

"You state that cheerfully enough. You were rich when last we met."

"Yes."

"You have been unfortunate; you have lost your fortune?"

"Every penny of it. Stay, though—it is best to be precise. It is gone, but it would not be quite truthful to say I lost it. The fact is, I have invested it."

"Ah," said Mr. Birley, with a brisk air of relief, "then there is still a chance."

"Of my being rich again?" asked Mr. Alabaster, with an amused smile.

"That is my hope, Richard."

"Banish it. Every penny of my fortune is irretrievably gone; and were I to inherit another, or were another to drop from the clouds to-morrow into my pockets, I should be as poor in twelve months as I am to-day. To speak honestly, Birley, I should invest it as I have invested my last."

"You speak honestly—you could not do otherwise—but, to my understanding, enigmatically. Come, Richard, be frank with me. I am genuinely glad to meet you—I am genuinely glad to renew our old friendship. Tell me about yourself. What has brought you to this pass? Can I woo your confidence—if you are reluctant to give it, for I am aware that in certain forms of poverty there exists a pride most difficult to overcome—by telling you something of my career?"

"I know it, Birley. I have watched it, and sought knowledge of it, during all these silent years. Except in so far as your inner life is concerned, you can not enlighten

me. You are on the high-road, Birley, outwardly. Your rise has been steady and sure, and I do not know the world if this day has not set the seal upon it."

"Were you in the Abbey, then?" asked Mr. Birley, with a flush of pride.

"Yes. You preached most eloquently, and you produced a deep impression."

"You approved of my words?'

"Hardly that. I congratulate you on your appearance in that noble pile, and on the success you obtained—though there is a theatrical smack about the whole thing—but I most heartily condemn the occasion and the theme."

"Well, well," said Mr. Birley, good-humoredly, "we will not discuss it. Our views, as well as our natures, are fixed and formed, and it would be a most difficult matter—indeed, I should say impossible—to make us different from what we are. So, old friend, we will agree to differ, and not waste time, and perhaps temper, on fighting an unprofitable battle. As the tree is rooted, so it must grow."

"Ah," said Mr. Alabaster, quickly and with something of eagerness, "you believe that—you admit that?"

"Undoubtedly. It is a natural law?"

"Applicable to all? That is your firm conviction, Birley? I may tell you it is mine."

"And mine—so we are in unison upon one point."

"You will not forget your words," said Mr. Alabaster, with a singular look; "you will not fly from them?"

"No, indeed. What occasion can arise for repudiating them? Give me credit for consistency at least, Richard."

"I will—and do, Birley. Only—only," he added, with a strange smile, "my thoughts at times rush swiftly on, and I often detect myself engaged in the process of matching present words with future acts. Frequently they clash, giving each other the lie. Birley, I should not

be doing you justice if I did not express my gratification at your conduct in this meeting of ours. Poorly as I am dressed, you do not appear to be ashamed of being seen in friendly converse with me."

"It would ill become my cloth," said Mr. Birley gravely, "to act otherwise, and it would be a blot upon my manhood to so deal by a friendship such as ours. And now tell me about yourself. What is the real meaning of this outward change in you?—for inwardly you are still the same. You are poor—will you let me assist you? I am not without influence, and the way before me is fairly smooth. Come, Richard, you will let me do this for old times' sake. It will be a favor granted from you to me. I can get you a secretaryship—a good one, with emoluments. We shall then see much of each other, but not more than I desire. Do you live near here?"

"I live within the shadow of the Abbey. You will come to my home?"

"Certainly. I shall be in London for some little while, and I hope we shall spend many hours together."

"I shall hold you to your promise. For your offers of assistance I thank you cordially, but, in the way you indicate, I shall not be able to avail myself of them. I may ask you for assistance in another direction—say in the direction of your purse, if you can afford to lose a trifle. Not for myself—for others. You wish me to tell you about myself. I will do so without circumlocution."

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A word, in explanation.

I, Charlie's father, had been in the Abbey during the service, and was present at this interview, and heard every word that passed. My presence was not noticed or commented upon. Like an invisible shadow, possessed of understanding, I walked by the side of these two men. There are scenes in the future to be portrayed, of which

I was also a silent witness, and in which, though they most nearly and dearly affected me, I was powerless to take part.

Looking in the glass, I see myself a gray-haired man, meanly dressed, with deep furrows in my face. I live in Pentecost, in one room, occupied by Charlie and myself. This room is above Mr. Alabaster's shop, in which he dispenses his herbs and simples. My fortune has melted away; the position I held in the world is lost, and I have been driven into the ranks of the poor, whom I loathe and despise. At one time of my life I had a fair share of toleration for them, though I would never admit that they were intended to be my equals; but now that I am brought down to their level I shrink from them and abhor them! For my own sake? No; for my dear Charlie's sake, who is compelled to herd with them, and who, being now a man, is not what I hoped he would be, a gentleman, with a proper recognition of the distance which should separate him from those so far beneath him. It is a torture to me that he does not share my views—that he exhibits an affection for the people I despise. When I argue with him, and endeavor to impress upon him the truths which I recognize as established by natural law, he listens in silence. He irritates me by not answering me, and it has happened that I have allowed my irritation to display itself in angry words. Even this has not moved him; with angelic sweetness and patience he has smiled upon me, and held my hand, and pressed it to his lips.

"Who is more likely to be right?" I have cried. "You, a child, unread in the world's wisdom—or I, your father, who have calmly and sensibly reasoned out these conditions of life?"

"I am no longer a child, dear father," he replies. "I am a man."

"Yes, my dear son is a man, with a beauty in his face which distinguishes him above those with whom he as-

sociates. By what mischance is he so misplaced? On this point he has something to say."

"I can not help it, father, nor can you."

I doubt, if he had the power, whether he would change his condition. He seems content, and so imbued with a divine compassion for his comrades that he would find it difficult to tear himself away from them. How gladly would I do so, if the opportunity offered itself! How I hate this mean and sordid life, these narrow courts, these creatures that I see around me, this room in which I can scarcely breathe! What crime have I been guilty of that a lot so wretched should be thrust upon me? I lash myself, and inflict fresh torture upon myself, daily and hourly; and from my dear son, who is all I have now in the world to cling to, receive no sympathy.

His love is being stolen from me. He says it is not so, but I know that it is, that it must be so. When love is divided, it can not but be weakened.

"My father ever!" with his arm thrown caressingly around me; "my own dear, dear father, whom I shall always love and honor!"

"But, Charlie," I say, "there have been times when you have left me for others. When you were a child, and we had taken a long journey together, you deserted me for Molka. It was only by chance that I came to Pentecost, and found you."

He replies that it could not have been by chance, and he begs me, with tears in his eyes, not to pursue the subject, but to be satisfied with his love. If it were mine, and mine only, I should be happy, but when I see him gazing at Molka with full-hearted eyes, and when I know that he would follow her to the world's end—

I must not think of it. It maddens me with jealousy.

She stands before me now in her common cotton gown and patched boots. In the time gone by Mr. Alabaster

warned me that she would be likely to grow into rare beauty, and his words have come true. Poor as she is, common as she is, ignorant as she is, I can not deny that she is very beautiful. She has her dog Spot still with her, and the novelty of its wooden leg has worn away, except to strangers, who, either for the dog's sake or because of Molka's beauty, bestow charity upon the girl. And she accepts it, unblushingly accepts it, without feeling the degradation.

"What else can she do?" asks Charlie, when I condemn her. "Has she not been brought up so? She has tried service, and has been turned away because of her weakness and lameness. She has sold flowers in the streets, but there are numbers of girls so much stronger than she, doing the same thing, that she can not get back the money she pays for them. There's Bold Peggy—she is stout-limbed, saucy, bold, defiant, and can push her way along. She sells out, and comes home singing, while Molka creeps along with her faded roses in her hands, and her beautiful face as white as the face of a statue. Molka is modest and fragile, trustful, tender, and affectionate. Bold Peggy thinks only of herself, and will idle her time with any man who pays her a compliment. In your heart, father, which do you think the better? Not that I blame Peggy, poor girl, for she knows no better, and has been taught no better."

"In my heart," I reply, "I hate them both!"

"You should not say so, father," says Charley, "and would not, if you had not some deep cause for anxiety in which neither Polka nor Peggy has a share."

"It is not of Peggy that we were speaking," I say, morosely; "I have no fear of her on your account. But that you should espouse the cause of a beggar such as Molka is, of a girl who trades upon her weakness and upon yours, who was born in igorance and vice—"

Heaven knows what I should have said in my anger

had not Charlie, fearing perhaps what was likely to come, put his hand on my mouth and stopped me with the words.

"No more, father. In justice to yourself, in pity for me, in mercy to Molka, say no more. My fate is bound up in hers irrevocably, and I will be true to her to the last hour of my life!"

CHAPTER II.

"LIFE SANCTIFIED BY HUMANITY."

"My story," said Mr. Alabaster to the Reverend Mr. Birley, "shall be brief. I was twenty-five when we parted—you, having taken orders, to commence the real work of life, according to your lights, I to enjoy life, according to mine. I was rich, you were poor. In the world's eyes, you have risen and I have fallen. I have my own views of that rise and fall, and you, who see that I am unchanged, and who have doubtless some remembrance of certain daring propositions, in which I used to indulge—somewhat reversing the usual order of things—would scarcely be surprised to hear from my lips that in my judgment it is you who have fallen, and I who have risen. God forbid that I should lay claim to distinction for living what I believe to be a right life! You spoke a few minutes ago of the pride of poverty. That, in my eyes, is pardonable. Not so the pride that sometimes springs from humility, which is as bad as the rich man's pride that springs from possessing more than his neighbor."

"I observe," said Mr. Birley, "that you scarcely take into account the lessons of civilization."

"I take a wider view than that imposed upon us by phrases. The true lessons of civilization, in my under-

standing, are, or should be, rooted in the heart of humanity. That every man willing to work should be able to provide food for himself and those dependent upon him—that I conceive to be a true lesson of civilization. That we should look with abhorrence, instead of toleration (I use a mild term), upon rich men who have obtained riches by unworthy means—that I conceive to be a true lesson of civilization. The strength of a true civilization lies in its moral as well as in its material fibers. That when we behold suffering ignorance, unmerited degradation in our midst, we should *hasten* to provide a remedy, not lag as legislation is in the habit of doing—that I conceive to be a true lesson of civilization. But I am prosing upon generalities, when I should be speaking of myself. Behold me, then, setting out to enjoy life at the time you were commencing your career. You are aware that a great fortune had fallen to me; it had to be spent, and, intoxicated by possession of wealth, I was twisted out of my natural self. For a very little while, I am thankful to say. I was arrested on the threshold, and the teacher was love. It was my happiness to make the acquaintance of a pure and noble woman; her father was poor, and had, like me, been rich; and he it was who had instilled into Mary's soul that spirit of large humanity which sanctifies life. In his youth he had learned many accomplishments; in his old age one of these enabled him to subsist. He gave lessons in music during the day, and occupied a humble position in the orchestra of a theater during the night. He had squandered his money foolishly in the world's judgment, nobly in mine. There is enshrined to-day in the hearts of the people the memory of a dead hero—a victorious soldier who, by pursuing the usual course, might have gained titles, honors, houses, lands, but who found his most exquisite pleasures in the ranks of the poorest of poor children whom he rescued, housed, fed, and taught, and sent out into the

world, fitly armed for life's battle, some to distant lands, where mortals are not forced to live like rats. They blessed him living, they bless him dead! Duty and charity were his watchwords, and he lived and died a poor man. No monument needs he in stone; from his ashes a tree has risen which shall be forever in flower, and shall be an incentive to good deeds in the future. I, who knew him not, honor and revere him as one among the many who understood and carried out the true lessons of humanity. My Mary's father, though only a poor musician, resembled this hero. He invested his money as I afterward invested mine, not for interest, but for human good—not always, but sometimes, fruitfully. Can you understand me—a little? No happier man than he ever drew breath. He lived in a perfect faith, and he died with a smile on his lips. Before he died he instilled into me something of his own spirit, although, as I stand here, I feel, in comparison with him, my weakness and impotence. But intercourse with him, and the brief spell of happiness I enjoyed with Mary, have had, I know, a purifying influence. Birley, it is not by man's words that he shall be judged—it is by his deeds. You are an eloquent preacher, and can move not only your congregation but yourself to tears. Does your duty end there? Who said, and to whom was it said, 'Sell all ye have and give to the poor'? A poor priest faithfully fulfilling his duties is a grand spectacle. He is treading the right path. These matters were freely discussed by Mary's father and myself, and Mary would sit by and listen in silent approval.

"'Do not wait long for your union,' he said to us on his death-bed. 'Losing me, Mary has only you for her rock. Use your wealth worthily.'

"We knew what he meant by that, and a month after he was buried Mary and I were wed. We had three years of such happiness as seldom falls to the lot of mortals.

We did not remove from the poor neighborhood in which Mary and her father had lived, and there she walked and passed her days, a ministering angel, who took sunshine with her into every humble home she entered. She died in giving birth to a baby boy, who survived her but a few hours. I sat in the chamber of death and vowed to continue the good work without fear of my future. Her spirit was with me then; it is with me now; it cheered and upheld me in my loneliness. The years that followed were not dark or gloomy. Life is short, and there is a hereafter. I will not dwell upon the details of my task. Suffice it that within a few years all my great fortune was gone. My only regret is that I had not another to send after it on the same errand. But had I a hundred such it would not have been sufficient for the need, the awful, fateful need, I saw around me. Some little good I was enabled to do, for Mary's sake, and I am thus far content. But I must confess that when I behold evidences of extravagance and waste incurred in the purchase of selfish, fashionable pleasures, I regard them as nothing less than sinful, knowing as I know to what sweet uses the money thus poured out might be applied. We live in an unthinking age. I am convinced that you can not be aware of the terrible condition of thousands upon thousands of the population of this city of light and darkness, of hollow gayety and gloomy despair. I will even pass over physical suffering. Birley, do you believe in the salvation of souls? Bear in mind your own words, 'As the tree is rooted so it must grow.' These words are a fatal indorsement of others set down by an earnest writer, who said that if what preachers preach be true souls are lost by force of circumstance."

"Terrible words, indeed," said Mr. Birley, more moved than he cared to show. "Richard, do you know what strikes me in you?"

"Tell me."

"That you use too intense a light in the views you take."

"Do you think so? Well, come and judge for yourself. Here is my address. I will not detain you longer. If, in your opinion, I have really been too warm in the advocacy of my cause, forgive me."

CHAPTER III.

"FRESH FROM THE FIELD OF GLORY."

It is not only on battle-fields that glory is sought. The British soldier in the land of his birth, safe from war's alarms, seeks for it at the bottom of pewter pots. This search was being assiduously made in the Pig and Whistle by three red-coats who had come home from the battle-field, and who at the present moment were more flushed with beer than victory. The hero of the party was Blossie.

A man full-grown, with muscles like iron, and flesh as firm as a rock. The profession of chewing straws, which had been his father's before him, and which he had declared should be his as long as he lived, had served well enough during his boyhood, eked out by acts over which let a veil be drawn, but had proved utterly inefficient for subsistence when he became a man. He came perforce into communication with police and magistrates in ways which augured ill for his future, which Mr. Alabaster would have forecast with tolerable fidelity had not Blossie, in a fit of providential intoxication, fallen into the clutches of a recruiting-sergeant on Westminster Bridge, who, having done a bad business lately, was only too eager to bag any kind of fish without regard to quality, that came to his net. Before he knew where he was, Blossie had taken the Queen's shilling, and, waking from his drunken fit, found himself a soldier in the British army.

He was not a good soldier, but he was such a finely framed man that the drill-sergeants, for their own credit's sake, took pains with him, and succeeded in reducing the unpromising material to some kind of order. He was not allowed to chew straws on parade, but he chewed them industriously when he was off duty, and after some months of rebellion, during which he was frequently punished, the conviction was forced upon him that for his own ease and comfort it was best to be tractable. Showy and attractive as was his outside, and jauntily as he bore himself, his moral nature exhibited no improvement; he was thoroughly base at heart.

This was of small account. He had been in victorious battle; his regiment had distinguished itself, as the phrase runs, and he came home, with those of his comrades who had not been cut to pieces, covered with glory. Was it not for him that the afternoon service had been held in the Abbey? Was it not for him that the solemn anthem had rolled through the grand old aisles, that the earnest preacher had worked himself into a fit of eloquent enthusiasm, that hearts had been lifted up and fervid tears been shed? That the lion will lie down with the lamb, is less likely at the present day than at any period of the world's history. Christianity and civilization appear to be the deadliest of foes.

Properly speaking, Blossie should have been in the Abbey, listening with swelling soul to the sermon in his honor preached by the Reverend Mr. Birley. But Blossie preferred the Pig and Whistle. Dear to his heart were the slums of Pentecost. On the battle-field, from which he was only too glad to escape without a scar, in the pregnant, solemn nights, when all surrounding circumstances should have inthralled him with awe, his thoughts eternally wandered to the courts and alleys of Pentecost, the very palace of vice, with its unhealthy houses and poisoned drains, all his fond desires converging upon the tap of

the Pig and Whistle. "I'll have a rare old booze when I get there," he murmured, as he gazed up at the starry heavens, and thought of Bold Peggy, and Molka, and all his dear old pals.

They were around him now, and he, pot in hand, was boasting of his deeds, as he gazed in admiration now at Bold Peggy and now at Molka's delicate and beautiful face. I knew why Charlie had dragged me to this den. His magnet was Molka, and he, also, was gazing at her, but in trouble and sadness, for her eyes were fixed upon Blossie, and she was drinking in his words. His skin was bronzed, his eyes were bright, his words were appropriate to the understanding of his hearers. His soldier life had improved him in appearance, and all Pentecost was proud of its hero; his two comrades, upon whom the dregs served out as beer in the Pig and Whistle had already produced their natural effect, leaned for support against the bar, and gave a maudlin approval of Blossie's brag.

"Wot a brick you are?" exclaimed Bold Peggy. "I'd give somethink if you was going with us to-morrer."

"Where to?"

"We'er going to 'ave a day in the country. There's a swell friend of Mr. Alablaster—"

"Old Alablastim," interrupted Blossie. "Wot's 'im and 'is swell friend been up to?"

"They're standing treat for an excursion. Vans and flags, and all that. It 'll be a reg'lar spree, Blossie. 'Ow I wish you was going with us!"

"Why do yer wish it so pertickyerlerly, Peggy," inquired Blossie, with a vain chuckle. "'Cause yer want a soldier boy for a sweet'eart?"

"I shouldn't mind," said Bold Peggy, with no attempt at shyness.

"That's the style for me," said Blossie, and began to sing:—

"'Sure there's not a trade that's going
Worth the knowing or the showing
Like that to glory going
Of the bold soldier boy!'"

And nearly every one in front of the bar joined in the refrain of the last line,—

"Of the bold soldier boy!"

Peggy burst out in a loud laugh, and commenced to dance, to the admiring plaudits of the onlookers.

"Charlie," I whispered, "come away from this vile den. It is no place for us, my boy."

"No," he replied, "I shall stay."

"Why—when I beg you to leave it? What attraction can there be here for you in these orgies, the end of which I know too well!"

He looked at me for a moment, and then turned his eyes toward Molka.

"Is it because of her?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"Do you love her, Charlie—oh, Charlie, do you love her?"

"Yes," he said, "I love her—I love her—I love her!"

A blindness fell upon my eyes, a blindness of jealousy and despair. This love of my boy's for an outcast like Molka, low, degraded, and vile by association with the vile, was the greatest misery that had ever fallen upon me. That such as she should rob me of his love, and defile his pure nature, filled me with a resentment so bitter that I scarcely dared to think in what direction it would lead me. If I could have done so by a look, I would have struck her dead at my feet!

"You're a beauty, and no mistake," said Blossie, addressing Peggy; "a reg'lar red rose. Now, Molka 'ere, she's like a white lily. Blowed if I ain't gitting quite poetical! That all comes of being a soldier. Wot d'yer

say, Molka—do *you* wish I was going to that excursion of your'n to-morrer?"

"Yes," she answered softly.

"No, no!" cried Charlie, starting forward.

"Why, Charlie," she said, in wonder at his agitation, "you're going, too, aren't yer?"

"Yes," he said, "I am going."

"Charlie," I whispered, drawing him aside, "I was in hopes that you would not go."

"I am going," he said, doggedly and sadly.

"But *can* yer come, Blossie?" asked Bold Peggy.

"*Can* I come?" cried Blossie, working the pot round and round, preparatory to his draining the last drops. "I shall like to know who's going to prevent me? Fill up agin, misses. Wot! when two blooming girls fall a-courting of me like that, it'd be a disgrace to the army to disappint 'em. Why, a man wouldn't do it, let alone a soldier! Wot's your opinion, missis?" to the landlady. "You're up to snuff you are," and then he broke into singing again:

"'We taste their taps,
We tear their caps—
"Ah! you're the boy for me!" says she.
"You're the darlint of me heart," says the bold soldier boy.'"

And the refrain was again taken up, in a more riotous and maudlin vein than on the first occasion:

"'You're the darlint of me heart,' says the bold soldier boy."

Blossie had an arm each round the waist of Bold Peggy and Molka.

"She is modest, is she?" I whispered to Charlie, recalling his own words. "She is fragile, trustful, tender! Which of those two do you think the better?"

"Do you wish to drive me mad?" he replied, in a mournful tone. "Can you not see how I am suffering?

Who am I that I shall condemn her? Has she not been brought up so? Oh, father, father, my heart is breaking!"

"Leave her, then, and come with me."

"I can not—I can not!"

"'Ere, young chap," cried Blossie to Charlie, "you look as white as a ghost. Take a pull at this."

I stretched forth my hand to prevent Charlie accepting the invitation, when a woman ran in and hurriedly whispered to Blossie.

"Oh, they're arter us, are they?" he exclaimed. "Well, let 'em ketch me if they can; but I'll have six-and-thirty hours to myself, and I'll report myself at barracks to-morrow night. They can't do much to me, and I don't mind paying for my whistle. Ain't I been fighting for the Queen, and don't I deserve a holiday?"

"You're a plucky one," screamed Peggy; "you're a man arter my own 'eart!"

The excitement that ensued could scarcely have been greater if all Pentecost had been on fire. Blossie was about to run out at the door when warning cries that the picket was outside and just going to enter, restrained him. He gave a hurried look around, cried "Hooray!" and vaulted over the counter into the back of the house. As he disappeared the picket entered. The neighborhood was being searched for soldiers absent from barracks beyond their proper time.

"Ah! here's two of 'em. Any more around, girls?"

With various strength the women declared, speaking all at once, that they had not set eyes on another the whole of the blessed day—asseverations which the guard received with good-humored, incredulous laughter.

"Pernaps you'd like to look through the rooms," suggested the landlady, who had before her, for the five hundredth time, a divided duty—duty to the authorities and to her customers; she knew perfectly well that Blossie

was not in the house, or she would have been chary of offering the suggestion. The guard said they *would* like, and through the house they went, as a matter of form, poking under beds and opening cupboards, amid a merry chorus of coarse badinage from the women, who followed them into the rooms, and whose only anxiety was that their hero should successfully make his escape. By this time Blossie was on the roof of the Pig and Whistle, in full sight of another admiring crowd outside, his partisans one and all, who exchanged congratulations, as though it was their own liberty that was in peril, when Blossie disappeared through a trap-door in the roof. But he very soon made his appearance again in the open, for the guard had entered that house, their intention being to search the whole street through, from end to end. Most of the wretched tenements were lodging-houses, wherein a bed in which a pig might reasonably have objected to sleep, could be had for twopence a night. Nearly all the women followed them, and treated them to a volley of "chaff," which was received with the utmost good-humor. Many were the invitations they received to a pot and a pipe, accompanied by such declarations as—"It'll do you good to wet your whistle. They're fine chaps, ain't they, Polly? I say, *I'll* take the Queen's shilling, if yer don't mind my petticuts! I'd make as good a soldier as the best on 'em. Ah! that she would, corporal! She can carry three 'undred weight on 'er 'ead, can't yer, Bet? Come, now, like good-natured chaps, stop and share a pot. You won't be called upon to pay for it. I'll stand treat. So will I. The Queen, bless 'er 'eart! *she* won't mind if you're arf an hour behind time. She's a good sort, she is. Three cheers for Queen Wictoria, gals! And three more for the Prince of Wales! He's the man for our money! And three more for the colonel! And three more for ourselves! Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!

So they went along the street, and into the houses, until the picket were fain to depart with Blossie's two comrades, whose heroic legs were so unsteady that they had almost to be carried by the guard who were conveying them back to their duty and allegiance. Long before which time, Blossie, having doubled on his pursuers, had found his way again to the bar of the Pig and Whistle, where he was drinking and singing, and Bold Peggy was dancing to the music of a flute played by a man with the reddest nose and whitest face in all Pentecost; while I stood helplessly by, watching Charlie, whose tender, melancholy eyes never left the girl Molka, who had stepped between him and my heart.

CHAPTER IV.

"SHE STOOD DESOLATE ON THE RIVER'S BANK."

THROUGH the pretty country lanes the pleasure-vans, with their motley freight of men, women, and children, wound their way. There were not many men among them. In point of numbers the women came first, the children next, the men last. There had been no selection, and no orders given as to dress or cleanliness. The order had gone forth that those who lived in Pentecost, and could spare the time, could enjoy a day in the country if they had a mind to, certain restrictions being set down with respect to the men. First come, first served; a dozen vans full, those for whom room could not be found being left behind.

The Rev. Mr. Birley had, for the occasion, placed his purse at the disposal of Mr. Alabaster, and had made some suggestions as to tidiness on the part of the excursionists. Against this Mr. Alabaster had set his face.

"We will have them as they are," he said, "without any gloss upon them. If they are transformed into an

unlikeness of themselves, how will you be able to judge? Let the native Adam present himself in all his originality. The halt, the blind, the lame, the maimed, physically and morally, they are every one of them welcome."

All this was well understood by myself and my fellows in Pentecost, and we crowded into the vans, which were drawn up in the narrow streets, almost torn to pieces in the eager rush. Close to us sat Molka and Bold Peggy, and a man in a slouched hat, and a cloak which hid his uniform. This was Blossie, who thus disguised himself, for safety's sake, while we were in London. Molka and Bold Peggy had made themselves smart, as had some others of the female sex, but a great many came exactly as they were in the habit of presenting themselves in Pentecost. On the box of the van in which we had our places, sat Mr. Alabaster and the Rev. Mr. Birley.

Horses prancing, flags waving, the bright ribbons at the horses' ears gayly fluttering. Out of the slums of Pentecost we streamed, directly into the purlieus of Westminster past the ancient walls and turrets, the points of which gleamed like diamonds in the sun, over the bridge, on each side of which the river stretched out eastward to the sea, westward to the college walls of Oxford. The surface of the water was a mass of living jewels.

"Oh, if they wos only real!" cried Bold Peggy.

We left the river behind us, and pranced through gray streets into the sweet country, when Blossie threw off his cloak with a loud laugh, crying,

"Done 'em this time! Who cares? I'm going to enjoy myself, I am!"

The whole country was in bloom. The trees were in full leaf and blossom, aud the air was melodious with the singing of birds. A cavalcade so gay and large could not escape notice, and women came to the cottage doors, and men paused in their work in the fields to stare at us. Not one of these sight-gazers escaped a greeting.

"Wot d'yer think of us, eh?" "I say, missis, chuck us a 'andful of flowers!" "Come up and 'ave a ride?" "*Ill* 'ave yer apples!"

Then the discussions and the wrangles as to what things were.

"That's a fine field of barley." "It ain't barley, it's oats." "It ain't oats, it's wheat." "Stow yer gaff! Wot does it matter wot it is, so long as it's somethink to eat?" "I say, wot's them blood-red flowers? Poppies? Ah, that's what they git laudanum from, ain't it?" "Oh, my eyes! look at them cherry-trees. Shouldn't I like to be up 'em!" "I say, there's a swell park—and wot's *them?* Deer, eh? 'Ere, give us a stone!"

These remarks, amid a thousand others, the sense of which was lost upon me, came to my ears, as well as the songs sung from time to time, in which occasionally nearly every person in every one of the twelve pleasure-vans joined in chorus. There was plenty of music, the red-nosed man who played the flute being in our van; half a dozen children had brought tin whistles with them, from which they produced tolerable melody; Jew's harps, trumpets, even a violin. The noise distracted me; I thought only of myself and Charlie, who did not open his lips the whole of the ride. Even when Molka spoke to him, she simply nodded or smiled sadly. Blossie was courting both Bold Peggie and Molka, who were the envy of the other women, the soldier's coat being in their eyes an irresistible attraction.

We stopped to give the horses water, and there was a general demand for drink from the excursionists.

"Now for your experiment," said Mr. Alabaster to Mr. Birley.

To one of the vans, which contained meat and drink, they all trooped, in obedience to an order passed round, baskets of sandwiches were unpacked, and served out to all.

"Wot d'yer call this—a sandwhich! D'yer think I'm going to make a fool of my mouth? Give us a good 'unk of bread and meat."

So to please them, loaves were cut in four, and meat cut thick.

"Ah, that's the sort! But give us somethink to drink, guv'nor."

Out came the milk cans, and men and women pulled wry faces.

"Milk! not if I know it! No beer? That's a nice go, bringing us all the way 'out 'ere, without as much as a pot of beer to take the thirst off us! 'Ere, gals, let's go to the public, and get somethink as we can drink!"

Off they trooped—some laughing, some jeering, all grumbling—to the wayside inn, where those who had money "stood" liquor for those whose pockets were empty. Blossie was in high feather, and was spending his pay freely. Charlie followed him wherever he went, for Molka was always with him; his scarlet coat, his bronzed face, with its handsome mustache, his loud talk had magnetized and bewitched her.

"Ain't he splendid?" she said to Charlie. "Did yer ever see a man like 'im? He won that battle, he did all by his own self. The Queen's going to give 'im a pension and three gold medals, and he's going to make a lady of me, Charlie. Only think!"

Charlie did not reply, and when I urged him to return to London, saying that, although I had no money to pay for riding back, we could walk the way, and reach our home before night, he shook his head, and mounted to his seat in the van near the girl who was breaking his heart. We drove through leafy forests and scenes, whose beauties, under happier auspices, would have filled me with delight and attuned my mind to lofty thought, but now they fell dead upon my soul; and when at length we halted for the day in an ancient wood in which beech-trees centuries old

still flourished, I threw myself upon the ground, and buried my face in my hands. If Charlie had but come to me then and said, "Father, let us turn our backs upon these people forever; let us live only for each other," how happy would those words have made me! If he had only sat by my side for a little while with his hand in mine, so that I might have felt assured that he was not utterly estranged from me! But I was alone, and he was with Molka. I dreaded to think what I might be tempted to do, if I met her in a secluded part of these ancient woods with no witness near us. As I lay brooding in this miserable state I heard voices of two men conversing—Mr. Alabaster and Mr. Birley.

"Bearing in mind what you have told me of Molka," said Mr. Birley, "I have given her some attention, and I do not find that she justifies your opinion of her."

"I have also observed her," said Mr. Alabaster thoughtfully, "and am much disturbed about her."

"As to her general good behavior, as to her modesty, do you not think you have been mistaken in her?—and, following up that new view in its natural direction, do you not think you may have been mistaken in your general estimate of these residents of Pentecost?"

"Of them," replied Mr. Alabaster, "you have never heard me speak in terms of praise—only in terms of pity. I do not ask you to admire them—I ask you simply never to forget that it is next to impossible they could be different from what they are. Respecting Molka, I can but account for her altered behavior in one way. Reflect for a moment, Birley. In your own station have you not had experiences of young girls who have been led away—some even to shame and ruin—by men with specious tongues and showy exteriors? This phase of life has formed the theme for poem and story, which have been always successful because they are human. And these girls, remember, have, in nearly every instance, had parents and

wise counselors around them from their birth; have been carefully nurtured and carefully brought up; have had good lessons instilled into them; have been taught the value of morality and virtue and religion—and yet they have fallen. If you can find excuse for them, how much more readily should you find an excuse for a child like Molka, who has had no moral training, who has neither the love of God to uphold and strengthen her, nor the fear of God to deter her from entering the wrong path? She is defenseless; her naked body is without shield. Her innocence is her betrayer; her simplicity is her deadliest foe. What speaks to her? Nature. The passion of love, comes it not to all alike, and is not Molka's the season of love? There appears before her this base hero, who takes her heart captive. She does not stop to consider. Love never does. Cunning can take care of itself. She has not a particle of it. I confess that, with this false glamour upon her, I fear more than ever for her future. Poor child! Heaven alone can protect and save her."

Then they passed out of hearing.

Something of what Mr. Alabaster's words conveyed to my mind comforted me, imbued me with hope. If what he dreaded occurred, if this base hero betrayed and deserted Molka, and brought her to shame, then would the scales fall from my Charlie's eyes; then would he see her in her true light; then would he shun her with loathing, and come to me again with single heart.

"Let the blow fall soon," I cried. "Devil in the shape of man, work her ruin swiftly, and restore my son to my loving heart!"

The words were no sooner uttered than I saw them—Molka and the hero of Pentecost—pass within a dozen yards of me, side by side. He was talking loudly, laughing wildly; his eyes shone with triumph as he gazed upon her drooping head. Once she raised her face to his; it

was bright with blushes, and a soft and tender light was in her eyes. He stooped and kissed her lips, and they passed out of sight. Following them was my son, whom I did not see till they had passed away. His limbs were trembling, his cheeks were pallid; a groan escaped his white lips. He also passed out of sight in the direction they had taken.

"Only for a little while," my son," I murmured; "only for a little while! When shame gives me the victory, you will be mine again!"

The day dragged out its weary length; for some the hours, laden with pleasure, flew all too fast; for me they lagged. I took no share in the amusements; I neither eat nor drank. But although for me the minutes were clogged with lead, I bore the torture more patiently than I otherwise should, because of the hope that this dark day would be the prelude of a brighter future. As for Molka's future, what was that to me?

They came to summon us to the vans. It was time to return to Pentecost. Night would be upon us before we reached London. But there would be moonlight and starlight to illuminate the white roads and the silver branches of the trees. And a joyful hope was mine. From my heart a heavy weight was being gradually lifted.

Charlie and I climbed into the van together. The driver was about to start.

"Stop!" cried bold Peggy, "we are not all here! wait for Molka and Blossie!" And then, in an undertone, "I'll pay 'er out for this, as I'm a living woman!"

We waited—five minutes, ten, fifteen. I held Charlie's hand, and I felt his fingers throb with convulsive movement.

"Can't stop any longer," said the driver; "it'll be midnight before we get to London, as it is."

I blessed the chance. My triumph was approaching.

The driver smacked his whip, and the horses started. But Charlie was on his feet, swaying to and fro.

"Set down, set down," they cried to him, "or you'll be pitched out!"

He paid no heed to their warning cries. Scrambling over them, he leaped from the van and ran into the deeper shadows of the woods. I, who had leaped out after him, had some difficulty in following him, he ran so fast. I heard, from a distance, the rattling of hoofs, and the music and singing in the pleasure-vans. Gradually the sounds died away, and all was still and silent. Charlie and I were alone in the woods.

It had suddenly become night. The trees bent their heads slowly and solemnly, as if in prayer; there was a worshipful murmur from the waving branches; as I looked up I saw that the topmost of them formed a kind of arched canopy, through the interlacing of which the stars were sadly shining. Charlie turned upon me.

"Why do you follow me, father?" he asked.

There was no petulance or anger in his voice; it was fraught with melancholy.

"I have no one in the world but you, my son," I said. "You are my only hope."

"And yet," he said, in the same melancholy tone, "if it were possible for me to obtain happiness in the way I desire, you would begrudge it to me. What is that?"

A white shadow glided past us; he darted after it, but it died in the moment of its birth.

"I thought it was Molka," he murmured, and then, returning to me, he continued his theme. "Yes, you would begrudge me my happiness—you, who say that you love no other than me. My heart speaks to me; I listen to its voice; it condemns you, father."

"Charlie, Charlie!" I cried, holding out my hands to him appealingly. He took them and kissed them, and when he set them loose they were bedewed with his tears.

"I can not help it,—father; nor, perhaps, can you. Poverty and privation I can bear, but you would rob my life of love."

"Is it not stolen from you, Charlie, without my intervention?"

"Again those doubts!" he exclaimed. "Again those calumnies! I will not listen. Molka! Molka!"

And he went from me, and ran through the woods, calling her name.

I followed, keeping at some little distance from him, so that I might not further vex him. All my hopes now rested in his quick discovery of Molka's shame.

Ah! that long, torturing, never-ending night! Black darkness infolded us for hours, but occasionally in the distance visions appeared in a halo of dim light, which faded gradually away as we approached them. The central figures of these visions, raised no less by physical exhaustion than by hopes and fears that were fighting their sickening battle within me, were always Molka and Blossie.

A moss-covered hill, upon which the girl and the man were sitting, she weaving garlands of flowers for him, which he tore to pieces the moment he received them, laughing and singing, while she continued to smile upon him even as he destroyed her loving handiwork.

"They are there," said Charlie. "I must have her!"

Their forms faded, and were merged in the shadows of night. The moss-covered mound disappeared.

"Charlie," I said, "these are but deceitful fancies. Take my hand—lean upon me; we will return home. I will work for you, slave for you; happiness may still be ours."

"Happiness *will* be ours," he replied, "when I find Molka."

The lights of lamps in the distance, gleaming in the windows of a public-house, and from its partly open door,

through which indistinct forms of men and women and children entered and departed. In the front of the public-house a long line of street-lamps, tapering to a narrow point. The door was opened wide from within, and held open, displaying a motley crowd, drinking and waving their hands and pots and glasses. A lurid glare illumined the scene, which presented itself to my senses as a very saturnalia of unrestrained and vicious license. A sudden space in the center, through which were revealed the figures of Molka and Blossie drinking, their faces aglow with excitement.

"Molka! Molka!" cried Charlie, running toward the vision, which faded swiftly away, and was lost in the night.

Charlie stood in mute despair, his arms still outstretched.

"Are you now convinced?" I said. "Though these are but delusions, they show you the truth, and are sent for a wise purpose. Be persuaded, my son; return home with me, who will deem no sacrifice too hard to make, who will shrink from no labor, till he brings peace to your soul."

"My soul will never know peace," said Charlie, "till I find Molka, and save her from this peril."

"You can not undo the past," I said. "Shame rests upon her name forever."

"She has all the more need for me," he replied. "I will find her, and comfort her."

A yellow, sickly glare appeared in the skies. We walked toward it, and found it proceeded from the city's lights. They converged upon one avenue—a bridge. The glare grew dim, the bridge grew dark. A flight of stone steps was faintly outlined, terminating on the river's bank. The sullen waters washed against the arches. At the top of the flight of stone steps stood a woman in rags. Her face was white with want and despair. It was Molka, and I held my breath. Charlie seemed incapable of movement,

and presently she began to descend the steps. No soul was near her. She stood desolate on the river's bank, alone with her sin and shame. She had no hat on her head, and her long hair hung loosely down upon her shoulders. A boat was near her, secured by a chain to a log imbedded in the ground. She stepped upon the boat, and, stooping, freed it from its imprisonment. Then she lifted an oar, and pushed out into the depths of the river.

Still Charlie did not move; still he was safe by my side. Horror had deprived him of motion. *My* thought was:

"In a moment she will be gone! In a moment, and she will no longer hold her fatal power over my son!"

She reached the point she desired; she stood upright on the boat; she raised her arms, which now I observed were bare, to the pitless clouds.

"No, no!" cried Charlie, wresting his hand from mine; "not that, Molka—not that! For God's sake not that!"

He flew toward her, and I flew after him. She sprung into the air, fell, and the waters closed over her. With a wild scream Charlie leaped from the bridge, and I leaped after him—and fell to the ground clasping the stones. The bridge, the river, the boat, was gone, and I was alone in the world. Charlie was lost to me forever.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

THE DIVINE LEGACY.

CHAPTER I.

"HIS HEAVENLY PITY FOR THE ERRING AND UNFORTUNATE MOVED ME TO WORSHIP."

I LOOKED at myself in the glass in the common, mean room I occupied in Mr. Alabaster's house. It was with difficulty that I stood upright. Chill winter was not only upon the city; it was upon me. My hair was quite white.

How long had I been ill? When last I saw my dear Charlie it was summer, and now I could see the snow clinging to the roofs, and dropping with dull thuds upon the pavement. Had months only passed, or had I been years tossing in delirium upon my bed, calling for Charlie, and never being blessed with a sight of his beautiful face? If he were not dead, if the visions I had seen in the woods were, what I had hoped they were, mere phantasmagoria of a fevered brain, then he should be alive and with me, tending me as I would have tended him, giving me some small return for the love I had bestowed upon him. Who would enlighten me upon this point?—who would relieve my aching heart?—who but Mr. Alabaster? Turning from the looking-glass, I saw him in the room. He led me gently to a chair.

"You are yet too weak to be moving," he said; "you have had a hard fight with Death, and have conquered him."

"How long have I been ill?" I asked, faintly.

"It was in the summer of last year you accompanied us on our holiday excursion to the country."

"In the summer of last year!" I repeated, in wonder. "You are not mocking me!"

"No; there is no room for jest in such a condition and circumstances as yours."

"Tell me what has occurred during this year or more."

I made no mention of Charlie yet. I had not courage so suddenly to speak of what was nearest to my heart.

"You were brought home late on the night of onr holiday excursion, long after we had returned. When the vans started back for London, you were not the only one missing. Your son Charlie—"

He paused, arrested in his narrative by the convulsive twitching in my face.

"A moment," I said with difficulty, speaking with sufficient distinctness to be understood. "In mercy, go no further till you relieve my aching heart. My son! Does he—"

I could not ask the question. My tongue cleaved to the roof of my mouth.

"Does he live, you would ask?" said Mr. Alabaster. "Yes, he lives."

The joy I felt was swiftly followed by a feeling of terror. Living, why was he not with me? If he no longer loved or cared for me, would it not be better that he should be dead? Then could I mourn for him in sorrow and in love; as it was, the thought of him brought me nothing but despair.

"Shall I go on?" asked Mr. Alabaster. "Are you strong enough to hear what I have to say?"

"I do not know; but I must hear it, though it kill me. Does that wretched girl live also?"

"Of whom do you speak?"

"My tongue almost refuses to utter her degraded name. I speak of Molka."

"She lives, poor child! Shall I now continue?"

"Yes; but you must pardon me for any wild words I may speak. When Charlie and I were alone in the wood on that fatal night, I was haunted by terrible fancies. I thought that Charlie and the wretched being who has been his ruin—"

"You cried for mercy just now," interrupted Mr. Alabaster sternly. "Be merciful to her, as you hope for it yourself. What was your thought of her and your son?"

"That they were dead—in the river!"

"Poor Molka! Such things have been, and, alas! will be. But as yet she lives. You were not the only one missing. Your son did not return with us, nor did Molka and her betrayer."

"Her betrayer! Ah, that much of my fancies was true!"

"You appear to exult in it. Beware! or retribution will fall upon you. Not for you, or me, or any erring mortal, to cast the stone. You were brought home alone —by whom I know not. It was long past midnight when I heard a knock at the street door, and upon opening it saw you lying on the steps. I carried you into the house and into this room, which you have not left from that time. You were in a high fever, and you spoke of a bridge, a boat, a river. You uttered imprecations upon the unfortunate girl's head; you called despairingly for your son. Had it not been for the love I bear him, love inspired by a recognition in him of noble qualities which, unless I mistake, you deem degrading—had it not been for this, I say, I should have carted you out of my house, so strong was my indignation at the cruel words you uttered with respect to Molka. But for his sake I attended you."

"Did *he* not come to me?" I asked imploringly. "Has he left me all these months to the care of a stranger?"

"You shall hear. I tended you, not believing you

would live, your condition was so dangerous. A week after you came home your son appeared and inquired for you."

"He did not forget me, then!" I exclaimed, the tears gushing to my eyes. "He did not forget me!"

"He was hollow-eyed, haggard, emaciated, but in his face the old sweet beauty reigned, which surely must be index to the divine goodness of his nature. I informed him of your state, and he thanked me for my care of you. I led him to your bedside, and as he sat by it and listened to the vile words you uttered against Molka in your delirium, he shuddered and hid his face—as though he would fain deceive himself with the hope that it was not his father who was so unmerciful. He inquired not only after you, but after Molka, who had not been seen in the neighborhood since the excursion. It appears that, fearing Blossie would betray her, he leaped from the van when it was discovered that those two had not taken their places, with the intention of following them and saving her. You also left the van; I know not what passed between you and your son, but on that night you were parted."

"He deserted me for her!" I groaned. "For the second time he deserted me for her!"

"He searched for her in many places for a week, and did not succeed in tracing her; and he came back to Pentecost in the hope that she had returned to her old quarters."

"She was not here?"

"She was not here. Then he confided to me his determination to discover her, if possible, and if too late to save her, to comfort and console her. On that night it was—on the first night of his return, when he and I were sitting together in my room below, and you were raving here—on that night he laid bare his heart, his soul, his

mind. I listened in rapturous wonderment. Never in my life had I met with a being so noble—never in this world's wide and sorrowful story was born a mortal whose nature was so near akin to the nature of an angel. His divine compassion for what he called irresponsible sin, his heavenly pity for the erring and unfortunate, moved me to worship. And there was this in him which distinguished him above all others of whom I have read or heard. He left the other side untouched. He did not condemn the frivolous and careless ones who pass through life engaged in the selfish pursuit of pleasures, squandering hourly in the quest, money, a tenth part of which would bring heaven to many suffering hearts. All the wealth of his divine nature was enlisted on the side of the erring and unfortunate, and these were typified in one being—Molka. 'I will never give up the search,' he said to me, 'I will never relinquish hope till I find her, or till I know she is dead.' He asked me to help him, and I promised to do so, if he would show me the way. He wished, it appeared, to be satisfied that you would be properly cared for during the period he might find it necessary to be absent from the neighborhood. 'I have no money to pay you for the task,' he said, 'nor has my father any. If you undertake it, it must be a labor of love and pity.' I undertook the task—for his sake, not for yours—and have faithfully carried it out. Your son made no allusion to the sentiments you expressed concerning Molka; he has never uttered a word of reproach against you. And let me tell you that you have never ceased your reviling of the unhappy girl. Your son has sat by your bedside for hours and hours together, while you have been engaged in pouring your vials of unjust wrath upon her devoted head. It was your son you made to suffer, not the hapless girl he loved and loves."

"What has become of her?" I asked sullenly.

"Charlie never ceased his inquiries after her, and fol-

lowed many a false scent. 'I hear she is in Portsmouth,' he said, and to Portsmouth he went, returning on the day he appointed, with failure written on his white face. To almost every place where there was a soldiers' barracks he went, unsuccessfully. How he made his way thither, and in what manner he supported himself, is a mystery to me. I, who am nearly as penniless as yourself, could do little to help him, but I doubt, if I had been richer than I am, whether he would have accepted the full assistance I should have offered him. His reply would have been, 'There are others whose needs are greater, whose claims are more pressing; help them. I can live on a crust.' And, indeed, he must have done so the most of the time. Last spring Molka returned to Pentecost. Charlie was absent, seeking her in another direction. Bold Peggy informed me of her return, and there was a threatening accent in her words, a dark, revengeful look in her eyes, which I saw boded ill for the hapless child. When she came into my shop to tell me that Molka was in Pentecost, she asked for you. I informed her that you were still in bed, delirious, and unconscious of all that passed around you. 'Well,' she said, upon that, 'if he don't hunt her out of Pentecost, I will. I hate her as much as he does.' She is Molka's sworn enemy, and, if she can, will hunt the poor child into her grave. Molka had taken her soldier from her, she said, and the sentiments she expressed toward her supposed rival were such as could only proceed from a bitterly jealous and disappointed woman. Alarmed for the poor child, I went to her, and could scarcely restrain my tears when I beheld her. Such a picture of misery and wretchedness I, who am used to such pictures, never saw before, and trust I may never see again. I gave her food; she needed it, and eat it greedily. I dared not inquire into her history; but voluntarily, moved by the sympathy I exhibited toward her, she told me a little. Would you have it in pregnant words? Betrayed—de-

serted—penniless—despairing! Fill up the details for yourself."

"She has deserved her harvest," I said.

"Merciless! merciless!" murmured Mr. Alabaster. "But you must settle the account with your soul. I have promised to tell you all I know, and I will do so and leave you. She inquired, timorously and shrinkingly, after Charlie."

"She dared!" I cried.

"She dared. With an intuitive perception that he would not shun and loathe her as her father does, and yet from no desire to thrust herself upon his notice, she asked me, timidly, to give her some particulars of him, and she spoke—restrain your anger—as if he himself were in need of some kind of charity and pity."

"Pity from such as she! I know her intention. Having lost one lover, who, having had enough of her, threw her off, she wished to entangle my boy with her arts. Well, she succeeded. Tell me that, and fill to overflowing my cup of sorrow."

"It was not so, and you do her a foul wrong. I told her of Charlie, but, fearing to raise false hopes, concealed from her how he was suffering for her sake. I said I hoped she would soon see him. She said she hoped so, too, and then she burst into a fit of passionate tears, and cried, 'No, no; I must not see him! I should sink to the earth in shame!' I feared then, and what I have since heard has confirmed my fear, that she was about to become a mother. Stop! I will not listen to the words I see hanging on your lips. Spare your reproaches and your expressions of triumphant self-vindication. I left her, somewhat consoled, and she kissed my hand at parting. A week afterward Charlie returned, and I told him of Molka and where to find her. He went, and came back in deep tribulation. She was gone. Bold Peggy had hunted her away, and she was lost again, to wander

through the world, desolate and friendless. I dread to think of what has happened to her. Charlie renewed his efforts to discover her, with no greater success than he had already met with. Three days ago he left the house, saying he believed he had a slight clew. It is at his request I have made this disclosure to you. He desired me, if at any time during his absence you should awake in a conscious state from your long delirium, to relate to you all that has occurred. I have done so in as plain words as I could command. If you have any questions to ask bearing upon Molka and your son, ask them briefly and quickly. There is but little sympathy between you and me, and I can not find the excuse for you that I find for the denizens of these wretched courts and alleys. *You* were not born in ignorance and vice, and you have exhibited a lack of humanity which shocks me. I decline to argue with you."

"And I with you. My questions shall be few and short. What has become of Molka's soldier hero?"

"His regiment is in India, and he with it."

"Are they married?"

"No."

"When do you expect my son to return? Remember that he *is* my son, and that he owes me both love and duty."

"In four days from this at the furthermost—perhaps earlier. He has never exceeded the limit he has set upon his absence."

"Do you not see that, while this woman lives, there is no chance of peace or happiness for him? Are you, being his friend, as you say you are, so blind as not to perceive that his life would be a blessing to him and to me if this woman were removed?"

"How removed? Dead?"

"Yes, dead. He has in him, as you have acknowledged, noble qualities. Who should know this better

than I, his father, who have watched him from his birth, who, even when he was a babe, hoped and believed that a noble future was before him—a future which this creature has marred and wrecked?"

"Not so. The qualities I perceive in him converge all to one supreme end, the comfort and the rescue of such as Molka. His pursuit of her has sanctified his life. In his nature I recognize the true genius of humanity, and when he is called away our blessed Lord will welcome him with the words, 'Well done, oh, true and faithful servant!'"

CHAPTER II.

"THE WANDERER."

As he left me, strength returned to my weakened frame, and I was able to go into the streets. The winter breeze refreshed me, but the squalor and degradation I saw around me made me glad to get into the wider thoroughfares. The snow on the pavement was whiter there, and I gazed with a sense of pleasure upon the spires and turrets of the Abbey, whose delicate outlines, spiritually silvered, shone sharp and distinct in the clear cold air. I was about to cross the bridge, when a woman swung herself in front of me, and I recognized Bold Peggy.

She had grown bolder and more brazen during my long illness. The beauty which spring brings even into the plainest features was entirely gone, and she stood before me the very embodiment of coarseness. She was comfortably dressed, her feet were well shod, and she had a warm, gaudily colored shawl round her shoulders. She wore no hat or bonnet, but her thick black hair was an abundant protection and covering for her head. Large

gilt ear-rings were in her ears, and a brooch of the same common metal was at her throat.

"'Ere, I say," she cried, "I've been to old Alablaster's looking for yer, and he told me you 'ad gone out. I've got a bit of news for yer. You're looking jolly white, guv'nor! Your time's up, if ever a man's was."

"What is your news? Does it affect me?"

"Slightly! Where's Charlie?"

"In the country."

And I added, with sudden hope and anxiety, as I turned my face toward Pentecost:

"Have you seen him? Has he returned?"

"No," she replied; "I 'aven't seen 'im, and it ain't 'im as 'as come back. But it won't be long afore he's 'ere, I should say. Why, he's been follering 'er all over the country, and when he 'ears she's in Pentecost, he'll be after 'er like a flash of lightning! The last time she come I 'unted her away. And I told 'er, if she ever dared to come back agin, I'd make the place too 'ot to 'old 'er. Well, she's come, in spite of me; and I thought per'aps that you'd like to do the job this time. Look 'ere, guv'nor, she's in love with Charlie, that's what she is, the artful cat."

"Of whom are you speaking?" I asked, although I knew what her answer would be before she gave it.

"Of who? Why, of Molka, to be sure. Who else, I'd like to know! I ain't seed 'er myself, but it's all over Pentecost that she's come back; and if you don't pack 'er out of this, it'll be worse for everybody. Yer see," said bold Peggy, with a curious shame-faced hesitation in her voice, "I've got that feeling agin 'er that I'd be like to do 'er a mischief if I come across 'er. Not that I'm afraid, —not a bit of it; but I've been in trouble, and I've give a promise that I'd try to keep out of it, at least for a little while. That's the reason why I've come to you; but if you're too chicken-'earted to take it up, I'll do it myself,

and chance it. Unless I'm mistook, you 'ate 'er every bit as much as I do."

"You are sure she is in Pentecost?" I asked, gloomily.

"Sartin. I'll tell yer where to find 'er, if yer want to know. It's the lodging-'ouse in Pye Street, Mrs. Porter's, three doors from the Pig and Whistle, on the same side of the way. Top floor, back."

"Leave her to me," I said.

"You'll have 'er out of Pentecost, guv'nor?"

"Yes, she must go."

"And you're much obliged to me for giving yer the orfice."

"Yes, I am obliged to you."

"Will yer stand a pot of fourpenny?"

"No; I have no money."

"All right. I wish yer luck, guv'nor."

And away she swung over the bridge toward Kennington.

The news she had imparted to me set my blood on fire. Molka returned to Pentecost! In the hope of seeing my boy and dragging him from me! For what other purpose? It was not to be borne. I would threaten her; if that was useless, I would appeal to her to remove herself forever out of Charlie's reach. I knew a way to touch her heart. I would employ cunning, if necessary. At all risks, at all hazards, I would save Charlie from the shameful association. To that end I was firmly resolved.

CHAPTER III.

"IT IS FOR YOU TO MAKE THE SACRIFICE."

I WAITED until night. Darkness would best favor my design. Eager as I was to embrace my son, I was grateful that he did not return while Molka was in Pentecost.

At ten o'clock I ascended the stairs of the lodging-

house in which she had taken refuge. I knocked at the door of her room, and received no answer. Turning the handle of the door, I entered, without being bidden.

At first I saw nothing; but presently, when my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I dimly discerned the form of a woman sitting at the uncurtained window. I approached her, and laid my hand on her shoulder. She made no movement. I shook her somewhat roughly, for my impression—which proved to be wrong—was that she was aware of my presence, and wished to avoid communication with me. She started to her feet with a cry of terror and alarm.

"I beg yer pardon," she said; "setting at the winder 'ere, I fell asleep. Let me stop to-night, only to-night, out of pity! I'll go away to-morrer morning early, I will. I'll take my oath on it, if yer want me to—and if I can git the money to pay yer for the night's lodging, you shall 'ave it, true and honest, or may I die afore the night comes agin! Don't turn me out into the cold streets—don't for God's sake! Yer don't answer me! Perhaps yer think I ain't got a chance of paying yer. But I 'ave—yes, I 'ave! Mr. Alablaster may be able to give it to me; and if he can't, there's a young gentleman living there with a 'eart so good—"

I interrupted her sternly—

"You mean Charlie," I said.

"You're Charlie's father!" she cried. "Is Charlie with yer, sir? I thought you was the landlady come to turn me out. But you'll 'elp me, sir, won't yer, for this one night? Oh, I'm so grateful—so grateful! I'll stop crying in a minute, sir. Is Charlie with yer, sir?"

"No, he is not with me," I replied. "I have come alone to speak to you."

"Yes, sir," she said; "you don't mind my not 'aving a candle? I ain't got a penny to buy one with."

"It doesn't matter. We can speak in the dark. It will be better, perhaps."

"I don't know about that, sir," she said, and added, in a tone of deep pathos, "I am always in the dark, sir, it seems."

"You have brought darkness upon yourself," I said coldly, even harshly, "and you are bringing it upon others."

She gave utterance to a low moan, wrung from her by a recognition of my want of sympathy for her and her condition, and then she retreated close to the window, and stood there with clasped hands.

"Yes," I continued, "by your own act you have brought yourself to shame and degradation."

"It's true, sir," she murmured, and unclasping her hands she slowly waved them in feeble despair and bewilderment, "but I was blind—blind! and I knew no better. Oh, if I 'ad known, if I 'ad known! If some good angel 'ad told me, and taught me! Yes, sir, to shame and degradation! Oh, my poor 'eart—oh, my poor 'eart!"

"And, I repeat, you would bring them upon others!"

"Upon who, sir?" she asked, plaintively.

"Upon me—upon Charlie."

"No, no!" she cried, beating her hands together. "Not upon 'im—not upon 'im!"

"Upon him. Had you been a good and virtuous girl, you might have been worthy of his love. Had you not been, as you are, base and vile, his life might have been the happier for it."

She came close to me, and, laying her hand timidly upon my arm, said, in a low, solemn voice,

"Did Charlie love me, sir?"

"He did."

"But doesn't now," she murmured, retreating to the window again, "but doesn't now! 'Ow could he, being

wot I am—wot you rightly say I am, sir? Oh, if I 'ad known, if I 'ad known!"

"Better for him," I said, "that you had never been born—"

"And for me, too," she moaned, "for me, too!"

"Better that you were dead, than, living, should ruin his life and mine."

"'Ave I done that, sir—'ave I been so base and wicked as to do that?"

"You have—you have wrecked his past—you are wrecking his future. While you are in his path, distracting his thoughts, occupying his heart—"

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie! it might 'ave been so different—so different! If *I* had been different—if I had been shown the right way!"

She had sunk to the ground by the window, and the rising moon touched her form with light.

"While you are doing that, I tell you, you are ruining him body and soul—as you yourself are ruined."

"It is true, it is true!"

"In what I, his father, am saying, you—if you have any human feeling within you at all, if you have any recognition of right and wrong—should be as good a judge as myself, and should know, without direction, what you should do to atone for the mischief you have wrought. He can not raise you to his level. Would you wish to lower him to yours?"

"God forbid—oh, God forbid!" she cried.

"Twice has he deserted me for you, and would be ready to do so again. Is this natural? Is it human? What should be more sacred than the love of a child for its parent? I have sacrificed everything in the world for my son. What kind of work would even *you* call that which is successful in turning his heart against me?"

"Wicked work!" she moaned; "wicked, wicked work!"

"As for being poor, I am as poor as you are, and

Charlie is in the same condition. Through you, he has led a life of starvation and unhappiness—through you, I have lain on a sick-bed for eighteen months, and have been brought nigh unto death. You have truly called your work wicked work. Will you complete it, and effectually blast the lives of a father and his son? or will you undo it, and give Charlie and me a chance of happiness?"

"I will undo it," she said, in a hollow voice, rising to her feet, "if somebody will tell me how to. For my own self, sir, if you will believe me, I can see now that I never in all my life knew which was the right way to turn. It is too late to learn now, sir, ain't it?"

"Yes; you are a woman, God help you!"

"Thank you for that, sir—oh, thank you for that!" and she raised her arms to the smoke-dried ceiling, and murmured, "God help me!"

There was a pause of at least a minute, during which I seemed to hear the ticking of a clock, and seemed to hear the words, "From life to death I mark the record. From life to death—slowly, surely!" Where and when had I heard that refrain before? Was it plucked out of a dead past in which happy days of love and sorrow lay buried?

"But somebody," it was Molka who was speaking, "somebody must show me how to undo my wicked work."

"I will show you. It is for you, and for you only, to act—it is for you to make the sacrifice. You must leave this place to-night, and forever."

"To-night, and forever!" she echoed, looking toward the window, through which we could see the white snow slowly falling. "Won't to-morrer do, sir?"

"To-morrow may be too late. If Charlie should learn that you are here, all hope would be lost."

"Oh, it is 'ard, it is 'ard! But I'll keep my promise—never fear, sir, *I'll* keep it! Per'aps it'll reckon a bit on

my side by and by"—she shuddered as she repeated, "by and by, when everythink comes to an end!"

She stooped and picked up a bundle from a straw-mattress on the floor in a corner of the room.

"I'm quite ready, sir."

"What is that you have in your arms?" I asked.

She was pressing it to her bosom with soft cooings of love.

"It's my baby, sir—a little gal, like I was, once. Wot am I to do with her—oh, wot am I to do with her, to prevent her from growing up as bad and wicked as I am? It'd be better, wouldn't it, to—"

The shriek that Molka gave here was so appalling that the current of my blood seemed to be suspended, and I was relieved when she uttered a soft, long, hysterical laugh, followed by passionate kisses on her baby's face.

"Poor baby! poor baby! my light, my life, my dearest dear!" she murmured, and then to me, "Yer mustn't mind, sir. I'm terrible weak, and I can't 'elp pitying my baby, 'cause I've got no milk to give her. But that's nobody's business but our'n, is it, baby? Hush, hush, my sweet! Mother'll do the best she can for yer!"

The knowledge that she had a baby—that this added shame was hers—intensified my anxiety that she should leave the neighborhood without delay. I threw open the door.

"Yes, sir, yes, I'm coming," said Molka, and she crept after me down the stairs, through the street door into the street.

There were no persons visible but ourselves. The snow had driven them into their houses or familiar haunts. Unobserved, we walked along the narrow streets into the broader avenues. We paused on the outskirts of the bridge. Even that was deserted. The only man in sight was a policeman, walking slowly along, beating his hands together for warmth.

"Charlie mustn't be told, sir, the road I'm taking," said Molka.

"No," I said, "he must not know."

"But you must, sir. I'm going over the bridge—hush, baby, hush! She feels the cold, sir, and she must be ready to die of hunger—poor dear, poor dear! I'm going over the bridge into the country, never, never to come back. Good-night, sir. Forgive me for all the 'arm I've done!"

I nodded and she moved away. Before she was half across the bridge her figure was no longer visible to me. It was lost in the snow, which was now falling heavily.

CHAPTER IV.

"IN REMEMBRANCE OF CHARLIE."

HAD I yielded to Molka's entreaty to allow her to sleep the night in Pentecost it would have been too late, for on the following morning, some days earlier than he was expected, Charlie returned. He had returned in haste, and the stains of travel were upon him.

"Charlie," I cried, opening my arms to him, "my son, my dear son!"

He kissed me, and took my hand.

"I am not surprised to see you up, father," he said; "it was revealed to me on my way home."

His eyes traveled wistfully around the room.

"You are glad, Charlie?"

"I am glad, father."

"But revealed to you on your way home, my dear lad!" I exclaimed. "Surely your hope, which you speak of as knowledge, must have sprung from your desire to see me well."

"No, father, it was revealed to me as other things were revealed."

"You will remain with me, Charlie? You will not leave me again?"

"I can not say. A strange event in my life is approaching. I do not know what it is, but it will either bring happiness into my life, or—"

He did not finish the sentence.

"Happiness will soon be ours, Charlie. I, your father, can tell you so much."

He gazed at me with an inquiring, penetrating look.

"Oh, Charlie!" I said, drawing him close to me, "there are such signs of suffering in your face that my heart bleeds for you!"

He smiled brightly upon me and said, "Yes, I have suffered. But joy and peace will be mine, in this world and in the next, if the one fond desire of my heart is gratified. Why do you hold me so tight, father? I have business out, and I must go."

"Oh, Charlie," I said entreatingly, "I also have suffered. For more than a year no intelligible words of affection have passed between us. I have been as one dead to the world. Now that we have met once more in love, can you not spare me a few poor minutes? Do not leave me so soon, my child! Stay yet a little while!"

"I will stay a little while," he said.

I strove to win his confidence; with all the fond arts at my command I strove to induce him to open his heart to me; but he was strangely reticent in his communications. He said nothing of himself; the few words he uttered referred solely to my long sickness. He did not speak of his weary wanderings; he did not reproach me for the harsh terms in which I had raved of Molka during my long delirium; and the girl's name was not mentioned by him or by me. He spoke briefly of Mr. Alabaster, and called him a noble man, wise, philanthropic, self-sacrificing.

"He has told me the story of his life, father," Charlie said; "there have been few worthier. He will receive his reward—as will all who are not deaf to the cries of suffering humanity."

At noon he said he wished to go, and perceiving that he was bent upon it, I no longer endeavored to prevent him. I did not inquire what his errand was—being, indeed, fearful of doing so—nor did he volunteer to enlighten me.

"You will not be away long, Charlie? You will return before night?"

"Either before or during the night, father."

"I shall not go to bed before you come home."

"Very well, father. I shall be sure to be with you some time before midnight."

There was no lack of tenderness in his tones, nor could I truthfully say that the material evidences of affection had been absent in him during our interview, but I was painfully conscious, after he left me, of a weakening of the spiritual bond between us. I tried to argue myself out of this impression, but it remained with me to torture me, and I could not banish it from my mind.

The afternoon passed, and the evening. Night fell. I remained in my room the whole of the weary time, afraid, if I went out even for a few minutes, that Charlie would return during my absence, and that we might miss each other. I could hear the great bell plainly in my room, and I blessed each quarter of an hour that it proclaimed, and waited impatiently for the next. Six o'clock. Dark night. But this is scarcely correct, for a white shroud was upon houses and streets. Seven o'clock. Would he never come back? I paced the room to and fro, to and fro, in an agony of suspense. Eight o'clock—and still he was not here. I shut my eyes in the endeavor to cheat time of a few minutes, and when I opened them I uttered a cry of joy, for Charlie had returned. I had not heard

him ascend the stairs or open the door. But he was with me again. That was enough.

He sunk into a chair, and rested his head upon his hand, shading his face, so that I could not see it.

"You are tired, Charlie."

He uttered no sound, he made no movement.

"You are tired, my dear lad," I said again, my hand upon his shoulder. "You must have a long, long rest."

Then he removed his hand, and gazed steadily at me. A white and woe-worn face; eyes in which a nameless horror was shining.

"I have discovered all, father."

The same horror in his voice as in his eyes, and with a note of such exquisitely pathetic reproach in it, that every fiber of my being quivered at the sound. It was as though he, my son, had pronounced me guilty.

I summoned all my fortitude, all my courage.

"You speak of Molka?" I said.

"Yes, of her. You might have told me this morning that she had been here. But how could you—how could you—when you knew that you have driven her to her grave?"

"What I did, Charlie," I said doggedly, "I did for the best."

He threw open the window; the snow whirled into the room.

"It was such a night as this, and she was penniless, starving, despairing. Look out upon the cruel, desolate streets, and when you say that what you did was for the best, find your answer there! The one hope of my heart, that would have brought peace and joy to my soul, here and hereafter, was to save Molka from the fate to which you have driven her. You have destroyed that hope, and in destroying her, have destroyed me!"

What more he would have said I was mercifully spared by the sound of regular, heavy steps upon the stairs.

They stopped on the landing outside my room, the door of which was opened without ceremony. A policeman stood upon the threshold.

"I come upon duty," he said, "and I call upon you to answer my questions. It is known that you, and only you, can put me on the track of a woman, of the name of Molka, who was in Pentecost last night. You knew she was in the neighborhood?"

"Answer him, father," said Charlie, stepping to my side and taking my hand.

"Yes," I said; "I knew she was here."

"You visited her. At what hour?"

"At ten o'clock."

"How long were you with her?"

"An hour or more; but I can not be sure of minutes."

"Was she alone, or had she a baby with her?"

"She had a baby with her."

"Her own baby?"

"So she said."

There was a convulsive movement in Charlie's fingers, but he did not loose my hand.

"Was the woman in want?"

"Yes."

"Did she sleep in Pentecost last night?"

"No."

"She left the house with you. It is known."

"Yes; she left the house with me."

"Before she left did she make use of any particular words with reference to her baby?"

I was silent till Charlie said, "Answer him, father, for my sake." Then I replied:

"She asked, more of herself than of me, what she could do to prevent her baby growing up as bad and wicked as she was herself. And later on she said, addressing the babe, 'Mother will do the best she can for you.'"

"When she left the house which road did she take?"

"Toward Westminster. She crossed the bridge."

"You accompanied her as far as that?"

"Yes."

"Did she say anything before you left her—anything particular as to where she was going?"

"She said she was going over the bridge into the country, never, never to come back."

"Might it happen, from anything else she said to you, that you could guide us on the road?"

In the impalpable air there rose before me the spectral shadow of the unfortunate girl beckoning me on, and I answered, spirit-compelled:

"Yes; it might happen so."

"Then I must trouble you to come at once. We must track this woman without delay. And when we've found her—"

"Yes," I said, mechanically taking up his words; "and when we've found her—"

"She will have to answer to the law for the life of her baby, which was found dead in the river early this morning, having been in the water some hours."

Charlie's tears rained upon my hand and gently impelled me from the house into the snow-clad streets. The spectral shadow was before me and beckoned me on.

"We'll follow you, sir," said the policeman.

And then I saw that he was not alone. Two other policemen had been in waiting for us, and the three followed Charlie and me over the silent roads—past the old Abbey—over the bridge—at the end of which we paused.

"She must have gone down the steps here," said the policeman, "and laid the baby quietly down in the water at this point. Let us get on, sir."

My steps were spiritually directed, and I walked on, Charlie's hand in mine. The streets disappeared—we were on the country roads. No sound disturbed the white silence of the night. Our feet sunk into the soft snow,

and we trod our way noiselessly onward. No word was spoken; but Charlie's tears still fell upon my hand. By that sign, and by the convulsive pressure of his fingers, did I know that my son, guilty as I was, had not deserted me again. And the soft snow fell upon the fields, upon the hedges, upon the country lanes, upon the trees whose naked branches were fringed with white beauty. The land was clothed in purity. The eternal lamps were lighted in the heavens, and shone upon us sweetly and pityingly. And in the distance rose the outlines of a church which in the summer must have been glorified with lovely flowers. We drew near to it—nearer, nearer. The trees which formed the walls were silvered with snow, as was the porch which lay full in the light of the moon and stars. But a dark shadow was stretched athwart the porch. The spectral figure which had led me on disappeared as we stopped within half a dozen yards of the church. Then, with a sudden movement, Charlie slipped his hand from mine, and ran toward the figure, and raised its face to the light.

It was Molka—dead within the holy sanctuary!

Charlie rose to his feet, and throwing up his arms, with a despairing cry, fell prone upon the body of the girl.

The policemen stooped and tried to lift him up, but his arms were clasped round Molka's body. They knelt in the snow, and felt his heart; then looked up at me and said,

"Your lad has joined her, sir!"

Blinded by grief and remorse I tottered toward them; but the white snow fell now in furious torrents and walled them from me. The church, the sky, and every object by which I was surrounded were blotted out by my tears; and overcome by the terror and horror of the time and scene, I fell to the ground in a swoon.

* * * * * * *

When I opened my eyes again, and raised myself to a recumbent posture, I found myself in the chamber to

which I had retired after I had kissed the cold, white lips of my baby boy. My wife was sleeping calmly and peacefully, and as I gazed at her and at the sweet face of our girl-baby, which lay within the shelter of her arm, I clasped my hands in thankfulness, and knelt by their bedside in silent prayer. Then, awe-struck, I crept from the chamber into the room in which our dear Charlie lay. The flowers of love and remembrance were scattered over his lovely form, and on his breast were the flowers which had been gathered in the country by his young brother.

"Oh, God, I thank Thee!"

* * * * * * *

Two days afterward Molka stood with me by the side of our dear lad's grave. Her tears fell upon the earth, as she murmured, "Poor Charlie! Poor, dear Charlie!"

She accompanied me home, and will remain with us, even as one of our own. If she live, she will grow into a pure womanhood. In remembrance of Charlie.

THE END.

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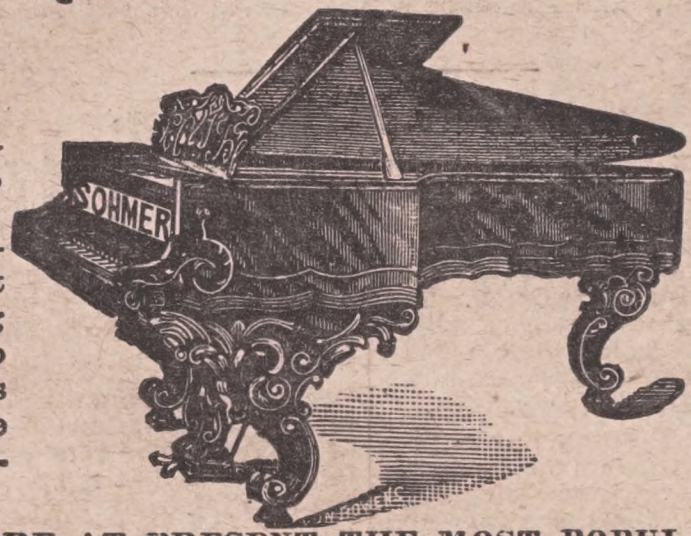

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